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PLAYS OF TO-DAY & TO-MORROW

THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS

S. M. FOX

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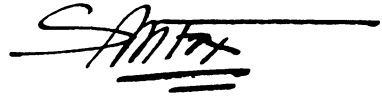

THE WATERS of BITTERNESS

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

AND

THE CLODHOPPER

AN INCREDIBLE COMEDY

BY

S. M. FOX

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN
ADELPHI TERRACE

PR6011
O813
1912

TO

MY DAUGHTER

VIOLA

(by request)

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INTRODUCTION

It is said that (with obvious exceptions) the British public doesn't care to read plays, even when it receives them embroidered with brilliant—sometimes almost incongruously brilliant and witty—stage directions. And it is believed by some, that an enkindling preface may help to overcome this coyness, tempting a careless reader who has picked up a volume, to pursue his investigation further. To be captured by such a preface is one thing: to be able to write one is quite another. And I must admit at once that my spirits are not high enough to attempt such an escapade.

Nevertheless I should like to introduce these plays with a few words of explanation.

In *The Waters of Bitterness* I have striven to present a woman who (from a superficial point of view) is almost wholly negative—poor rather than rich; elderly rather than young; plain rather than beautiful. For Miss Marsden is neither brilliant nor fascinating, nor particularly clever. She isn't even bad. She is simply ordinary—just one of a multitude; the by-product of our upper middle-class civilisation. Not having had sufficient charm — or luck — to tempt the other sex down the amorous path of marriage, and never having caught enough of its energy to start a career for themselves, such women remain (in a social sense) unemployed and unemployable. Can that be why we so often call them "insupportable"?

In England they hedge themselves in little genteel villas. On the Continent they drift from *pension* to *pension*.

Wherever met, they are set down as dull, yet are utilised as a matter of course, with hardly a "thank you." Unless we want some little service rendered, we hardly notice them. We simply accept them. If we are brutal we smile at them (I have heard them called "old cats" by other women); if we are exceptionally sympathetic, perhaps we give them a moment's pity. But we all agree on one thing—the virginal heart must be starved, the "vestal flame be guarded." Any sweet flutter of sentiment, however tiny and timid, is forbidden as ludicrous, or worse.

And yet!—

"You look on the black bombazine and high-necked decorum of your neighbour," writes O. W. Holmes," and no more think of the real life that underlies this despoiled and dismantled womanhood than you think of a stone trilobite as having once been full of the juices and the nervous thrills of throbbing and self-conscious being. There is a wild creature under that long yellow pin which serves as brooch for the bombazine cuirass—a wild creature which I venture to say would leap in his cage if I should stir him, quiet as you think him. A heart which has been domesticated by matrimony and maternity is as tranquil as a tame bullfinch; but a wild heart which has never been fairly broken in, flutters fiercely long after you think time has tamed it down."

Something does stir it. It wakes —face to face with tragedy! The woman's pride has fallen. Her heart is broken. There is no place for her now on the prim, spinster shelf where life, flowing by, had ranged her. She lies crushed in the dust at our feet. And then? Are we filled at last with comprehending sympathy and pity? I fear too often, not. We blame her and probably add: "She was always a poor thing—quite unbalanced—but at her age at least, she was old enough to know better!"

For even we do not understand.

Lady Gwendolen and her sisters are of course the very antithesis of such a woman. And while she represents a type which we may hope is passing away, they

belong to one which looms larger daily. Indeed, they are overwhelmingly keen, competent, restless, ambitious, unsentimental, unmatrimonial, up-to-date. They don't, like too many boys, play at their professions. They throw themselves into them with an impulsive ardour that leaves no time for preliminary preparation. The swimmer is stripped; the plunge headlong. If they fail, it is for want of training and experience; never because they are frivolous or slack. They are so masterful one would be inclined to call them "manly," if it were not too Victorian. As a matter of fact, they are extremely womanly—modern young-womanly. While Rupert, who is to be coerced into a serious worker — weak, good-natured, good-for-nothing Rupert, as they think him—finally turns the tables on Gwendolen—not because he is superior to her—for he is not—but because his practical commonsense shows him the limits of the feasible.

He has the sanest sense of proportion, while she (scorning all compromise)—with head in air and feet on ladder—of course has none. And then he has a sense of humour!

A satire on upper-class modern life, you may think. Not exactly! *The Clodhopper* is merely an incredible comedy. None of its characters, or their doings, should therefore be taken quite seriously. They should be rather viewed from that slightly oblique angle which is plotted to call forth a ripple of sympathetic smiles. To the reader who feels this is asking too much, it may be added by way of extenuation that the play was originally written to face the footlights over which the Comic Spirit leaps, nodding a different cap and bells from that which it wears as it lies in wait to tickle, between the pages of a book. Perhaps some day the play, after all, may be put to the double test—who knows?

THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS

CHARACTERS

MISS MARSDEN (an English lady).

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

KATE (her daughter).

MR HINDE-FALKENER (a stock broker).

DOCTOR FURLAN (an Italian doctor).

HUGH BROWNLOW (a young English painter).

ARTURO CORALDI (a half-Italian, half-English boy of 20).

Two Italian men, a boy, and a servant.

The scene is the terrace in front of the Capucine Hotel at Amalfi. The hotel door is on the right. There are trees and shrubs to the left, and overhead is a vine-covered pergola. In the background the Bay of Salerno twinkles over a low stone parapet, in the right hand corner of which is a gap, where the steps which lead to the path for Amalfi end.

There is a small table in the centre and chairs are scattered conveniently about.

It is a hot summer day towards the end of August, and the hotel has no other guests besides the above.

ACT I. . . .	Four P.M.
ACT II. . . .	Six P.M.
ACT III. . . .	Eight P.M.

A One-Act Version of this Play was produced by the Stage Society at the Imperial Theatre, 7th and 8th of June 1903.

THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY

S. M. FOX.

Produced by GRANVILLE BARKER.

Characters—

Hugh	KENNETH DOUGLAS
Arturo	W. GRAHAM BROWN
Miss Marsden . . .	MISS MADGE M'INTOSH
Doctor Furlan	HERBERT DANSEY

Scene.—THE TERRACE OF THE CAPUCINE HOTEL AT AMALFI.

Period.—THE PRESENT.

ACT I.

As the curtain rises, HUGH *is discovered painting in water colours to the left. He is a sensible, pleasant young Englishman of about thirty—quite well-balanced, with plenty of "public-school tone" in spite of painting in an advanced style, where drawing is sacrificed to colour.* ARTURO, *a delicate-looking, handsome Italian lad of about twenty, enters and watches him without speaking. He has evidently engaging manners and a sort of charming, childish appeal which attracts while it exasperates, but there is something petulant and a little spoilt about him which may be accounted for by his being an invalid. The whole scene is shimmering with the hottest sunshine.* HUGH *is dressed in flannels,* ARTURO *in white ducks.*

HUGH.

(*Painting without turning round.*) Are you going to tea with her?

ARTURO.

No, I don't think so. Are you?

HUGH.

Yes. It'll be something to do. Won't she be disappointed if you don't go?

ARTURO.

Probably! But I've had to disappoint her so often lately, she ought to be used to it by now. She asks me to tea nearly every day. Sometimes I go—and sometimes I don't. You've been here barely a week, so you haven't had time to get to know her.

HUGH.

I thought she asked us to tea from good-nature—like any one else.

ARTURO.

I dare say she does. But you see we were quite alone for three weeks together before you and the others arrived, and the truth is I've seen too much of her. She bothers me—that's the fact! She's got on my nerves . . . . Of course she's awfully kind and all that, but she's been a nurse in a hospital, and she's simply crazy for some one to look after. From the first she was uncommonly friendly. We got on famously till she found out my health wasn't up to the mark—then she simply wanted to nurse me.

HUGH.

She probably thought you another good case gone wrong.

ARTURO.

(*Evidently unreasonable. He speaks all the time in a fretful way that shows his nerves are on edge, and proves nothing against the lady.*) After that I hadn't a moment's peace. She follows me about—I assure you—as though I were a child, and she were my nursemaid. I don't want a nurse or a nursemaid—I'm not so ill as she fancies! I shall soon be better—I wish she would leave me alone! Why, I can't even post a letter without her wanting to see the address. It's a positive fact. We had quite a row yesterday when I told her I really couldn't be interfered with in that way. I mean she cried and so on. I was sorry about it afterwards . . . but what can I do?

HUGH.

(*Keeping up his air of sunny good-nature.*) Make it up by coming to tea. I suppose she looks on you as professional property.

ARTURO.

I suppose so! She knows I'm ill and she thinks she

is taking pity on me and cheering me up. But I don't want her pity—I won't have her cheering me up. Besides she's silly, you know. She would like to catch hold of one's hand and all that sort of thing.

HUGH.

(*Turning round as he puts his block on the ground.*) Casting pearls before swine—eh ?

ARTURO.

Now you'll see why I was so glad when you turned up a week ago. It has made our *tête-à-tête* life more difficult. Though I must say you spend a lot of time with those Hinde-Falkeners.

HUGH.

Ah ! well you know—they might buy—a picture.

ARTURO.

I shouldn't think they'd care much for *your* style of art ! Too blotchy and all over the place—not neat and nicely done up enough for them—I'm certain.

HUGH.

The daughter's charming, at any rate—come now ?

ARTURO.

I suppose so. She seems very much like all other English girls—just a cup of milk and water.

(MISS MARSDEN *enters from the hotel. She pauses, hesitates, and then comes forward. She is a delicate, refined, and* (*if you notice her closely*) *a pathetically wistful looking woman, well on in the thirties. One of those who is liked when known, but who attracts no attention—whose little sacrifices are accepted as a matter of course—and whose happiness no one puts himself out to further. Her face is pale and rather thin, her hair is scrupulously neat and her dress extremely simple. She wears no hat, but shelters her head with a parasol.*

MISS MARSDEN.

Ah! so I've found you both. (*Overlooking* HUGH, *who resumes his painting.*) What a pretty sketch! (*Timidly.*) May I watch you painting?

HUGH.

I don't much like being watched. And, excuse me—we don't sketch nowadays, we only make studies. Let me give you a hint—in praising modern work, "strong's" the word—not "pretty."

MISS MARSDEN.

I'm afraid all this new art is far too new for me. I'm very old-fashioned. And then staying on in a place like this for months at a time doesn't tend to make one less rusty. (*Sits and fans herself.*) How sultry it is—not a cloud nor a breath of air. I think this must be the hottest day we've had since I've been here. (*To* ARTURO.) I hope it hasn't exhausted you.

ARTURO.

(*Like a very charming child when it's fractious.*) I think it has.

MISS MARSDEN.

I'm so sorry. You mustn't stay out so long in the sun another day. (*To* HUGH.) I'm a kind of hospital dragon in looking after Signor Coraldi, am I not? I hope you'll both join us at tea. (*To* ARTURO.) You played truant yesterday, you remember?

HUGH.

Many thanks.

ARTURO.

Yes—I should like to come to-night. I'm afraid it will be the last time I shall have a chance of doing so.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Taken aback.*) Why?

ARTURO.

(*Doggedly.*) I'm thinking of going to-morrow.

MISS MARSDEN.

Going! Why? (*Her self-possession recovered instantly.*)

ARTURO.

Oh, I'm quite sick of the place. I want a change. You know the doctor said I ought to have a change. It's too hot for me here—too relaxing.

MISS MARSDEN.

Did he order you anywhere in particular?

ARTURO.

No, but he said I'd been here long enough, and I think the same. So I've made up my mind to start for the Engadine to-morrow. (*Protesting.*) Why shouldn't I? There is nothing to keep me here.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Sympathetically*). No, of course not. I do hope the change will do you all the good in the world. You oughtn't to stay a day longer, if staying here does you harm. But I needn't say we shall miss you.

ARTURO.

There will be plenty of other people coming. I'm sure nobody could be dull in the same hotel with the Hinde-Falkeners. Then there's Brownlow—you would find him most amusing, if you'd cultivate him a little —for a change.

(MISS MARSDEN *winces almost imperceptibly.*)

HUGH.

(*Gallantly.*) Why, we're already great friends. Besides I haven't your advantage in being an invalid. (*He gets up and holds his block in the sun to dry. Playfully turning on* ARTURO.) Oh! I assure you, my dear chap, that's why we all spoil you, in spite of your little tantrums.

ARTURO.

(*Impatiently.*) I'm going to see if the post has come in. I'll be back to tea.

(*He retreats down the steps to the town.*)

HUGH.

Not in the best of tempers this afternoon ?

MISS MARSDEN.

No. But think what allowances one should make for an invalid—patience—patience—unending patience ! I ought to know, I've nursed a great deal. Poor boy ! I take quite a motherly interest in him, as you may have observed. Indeed, I fancy my solicitude is quite a joke with the servants. I know I'm rather young for the *rôle*, but then you see in England a sick nurse is a privileged person. Out here it's different. Italians don't realise that ; and they always place the most sentimental misconstructions on a woman's conduct.

HUGH.

Of course—I know ! They're regular ferrets at that sort of thing—think about nothing but spooning.

MISS MARSDEN.

Well, it can't be helped. The truth is, we've been here three weeks together—most of the time alone, so we've seen a great deal of each other. I've tried to keep up his spirits and prevent his desponding too much.

HUGH.

These Italian chaps never play " footer " or anything. If they did, it would knock some sense into 'em.

MISS MARSDEN.

He's too sensitive, and he's really very ill. Dr Furlan, who comes to us once a week, has examined him, and tells me that he can't live for more than a couple of years—if that. I'm not sure if he knows. He's dreadfully cast down at times. But then every one who is consumptive has fits of depression. Besides he has had

such a very sad life. Has he told you? (HUGH *shakes his head.*) His mother was English and his father Italian. I don't suppose the marriage was a particularly happy one—these mixed marriages seldom are. He was an only child—doubtless his mother's darling, for you can see he's been a little bit spoilt. They were all in all to each other, he tells me, before she died, four years ago.

HUGH.
Rather rough on him—certainly!

MISS MARSDEN.
And then his chest began to go wrong. I don't know if it was grief that brought on the mischief—I daresay he doesn't know himself. Two years ago he was ordered to winter at Palermo. And at Palermo he had his next misfortune—as the world would call it.

HUGH.
Another misfortune!

MISS MARSDEN.
He fell in love.

HUGH.
(*Expanding.*) Nothing worse than that—why, I've done it myself.

MISS MARSDEN.
Yes, but there's worse to follow—he got engaged.

HUGH.
Ah! I've never gone quite so far as that.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Talking on, absorbed in her subject.*) To a little Italian girl without a *dot* or the title which seems the only alternative for such a deficiency. Of course the match was utterly out of the question. The young people themselves admitted it. But they still seem passionately in love for all that . . . I needn't tell you how the

fathers on both sides rose up and forbade the mere idea. The engagement was broken off—at least ostensibly. I daresay they correspond still. But Arturo knows in his heart it can never be. At times he seems broken-hearted. He once told me that he has nothing left to live for—but that was on one of his bad days.

HUGH.
He'll pluck up spirit in time.

MISS MARSDEN.
I don't know! One day he seems almost fiercely desirous of life—and the next, one may find him in the depths of despair. I'm anxious about him. Only yesterday he sent to Naples for something he didn't wish me to know about. (*With all the hushed fervour of a romantic woman on the verge of mystery.*) I was going down to Amalfi to post my letters, so I offered to post his—he wouldn't let me. He was quite disconcerted about it.

HUGH.
(*With entire good sense.*) But there might be a dozen good reasons for that.

MISS MARSDEN.
Of course! I tell myself so again and again. I tell myself I mustn't be morbid—and I daresay I seemed too inquisitive. At anyrate he was irritated about it. So I don't want to speak to him on the subject again. That is why I'm going to ask you to do me a favour. When the post comes in—if there should be a parcel, and you have a chance—I want you to ask him what it contains.

HUGH.
(*Half-laughing.*) Right! I will if I can. Are you afraid it's some sort of narcotic?

(MISS MARSDEN *nods her head. At the same moment* KATE, *coming from the town, enters up at the back. She is a pretty, fresh-looking English girl, and her clothes, though simple, have obviously been got at the very best places.*)

KATE.
O Mr Brownlow—you're not painting!

HUGH.
(*Picking up block.*) No—I'm drying.

KATE.
You always seem to be drying.

HUGH.
Well, you see—I paint so wet. Five minutes work and half-an-hour's rest. That's my style.

KATE.
Rather a pleasant style, I should say, for this kind of weather—justifies laziness. I'm sure yours is the best way of painting—all running colour and no bothering outlines. Are you an *impressionist*?—I hope you are! I've never met one, and they sound so exciting.

HUGH.
No. But I belong to the New English Art Club. And ignorant people think that's much the same thing.

MISS MARSDEN.
Have you been down to Amalfi?

KATE.
Yes. I've been down to bathe. But it's too hot even for that. Picture me swimming in tepid soup with my head in the sun; almost singeing. When I ducked, I assure you, I heard it frizzle. I left mother down in the church. She's too exhausted to move yet, she says, but she hopes to be able to get back to tea.

MISS MARSDEN.
I stay up here quietly in the shade through the hottest hours. It's so much the wisest plan.

KATE.
I'm not going to budge again—I can tell you. Now, Mr Brownlow, I'm sure your painting's ready for the next wash.

HUGH.
(*Gallantly.*) I don't want to waste my time painting at present. I'd rather talk to you!

KATE.
But I want to watch you. It's as good as a lesson, for I sketch a little myself, you know.

HUGH.
(*Playfully.*) Then you mustn't approach me. If you try to follow my style, you're doomed. I've broken the hearts of too many family circles already by letting the daughters copy me. But if you would care for a few hints, I should be too glad to give you some.

KATE.
You would! How awfully good of you.

HUGH.
Of course! I should only be too delighted. I'll fetch another block. (*He goes out to do so.*)

KATE.
I had quite a talk with your nephew down on the beach. He speaks English uncommonly well.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*With an imperceptible start.*) Who?

KATE.
That young Italian—Signor Coraldi. Isn't he your nephew?

MISS MARSDEN.
Oh, no. He's only a chance acquaintance.

KATE.
I beg your pardon.

MISS MARSDEN.
And he's going to-morrow.

KATE.
(*Quite innocently.*) You'll miss him, won't you?

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Rising—touched on the raw.*) Why should I miss him? He's nothing to me. He's rather ill, and I've been looking after him and trying to keep up his spirits—that's all. What made you think that I was his aunt?

KATE.

(*Confused.*) Mother got the idea from somewhere—because she imagined that if you weren't a relation, you must be (*hesitates*)——

MISS MARSDEN.

Extremely silly about him. Don't mind saying it! All the gossipy servants here—people who know no better—think I'm in love with him.

KATE.

(*With a kind heart's simplicity.*) Oh, no; mother couldn't think that, because ladies don't fall in love with people, you know, till people make love to them. But that needn't prevent your taking an interest in him.

MISS MARSDEN.

No, indeed; for besides being ill, he has lost his mother, and is engaged to a girl he can never marry.

KATE.

(*With growing sympathy.*) I'm so sorry for him—and for the girl as well. I don't wonder you want to be motherly to him and cheer him.

(MISS MARSDEN *is suddenly seized with a passion to lay her heart bare. All the bitterness of years of genteel repression seems to bubble up hot in her words.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

One should deny oneself that sort of wish if one hopes to retain the respect of one's neighbours . . . I may have been wanting in tact and worldly wisdom—perhaps I have shown my maternal care too frankly—but God knows I acted with the best intentions, without one

thought of self . . . You're only a girl now and can't understand—but some day I think you will. It is one of the saddest things in life. God fills a woman's soul with a longing for love and a hunger for loving some one or something. And then perhaps he makes her plain. She must anyway some day grow middle-aged.

KATE.
(*Vainly protesting.*) But you aren't middle-aged yet.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Every moment more carried away by her feelings.*) I feel so. My youth has gone without ever giving me a chance of real happiness. . . . The woman we were talking about—the woman I am slowly becoming, doesn't ask to be loved in return—she doesn't expect it. She knows she has grown too elderly and uninteresting even to hope for that. No! For although her heart may still crave for affection, she only asks to be allowed to lavish her tenderness with the unselfish sacrifice of a mother. . . . She isn't married—she has no one to love, and yet the need is there — probably all the greater because it has to be smothered. She asks piteously to be allowed to care just for some one. She is denied. . . . If she shows her weakness she runs the risk of tiring — perhaps disgusting — the one of all others she wishes to help. (*With rising emotion.*) She makes her folly the joke of the smoking-room—she makes herself the butt of every impertinent onlooker—the very servants sneer. (*With extreme indignation.*) She knows it; I know it. Ah, how bitterly I know it! (*With scorching fire.*) Have you heard the name they give us when we grow older?

KATE.
No.

MISS MARSDEN.
We're called "old cats."

KATE.
(*Overflowing with sympathy.*) Oh, poor Miss Marsden—

don't talk so please. You make me distressed and so very sorry. Things can't be as wretched as that.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Recovering herself.*) You must forgive me, dear. I didn't mean to trouble you with such a ridiculous outburst. But I'm rather upset this afternoon.

KATE.

Can't I comfort you ?

MISS MARSDEN.

No. (*Hastily.*) It's nothing—nothing to matter !

KATE.

Is it because he's going away ?

MISS MARSDEN.

Oh, no—it's the mortification of feeling I've probably driven him off.

KATE.

But you can't have done that. You've always been kindness itself to him.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Speaking with the half-mournful, half-bitter tone of a woman who has lost her last illusion.*) Oh, my dear ! that shows how little you know of men. It's that very folly of mine which we call kindness that is probably sending him away in disgust.

KATE.

(*Decisively.*) I think men are very ungrateful. They ought to be boycotted.

MISS MARSDEN.

It's our fault. We think they spoil us. But it's we who were made to spoil them. . . . And now you mustn't take to heart what I've been saying. Be happy — dear — while you can. And marry — dear — marry before it's too late. I once had the chance—I scorned it. Looking back, I see the refusal wrecked my life.

HUGH.
(*Entering from the hotel.*) Here's the block at last.

MISS MARSDEN.
I won't interrupt the lesson. (*She goes into the hotel.*)

HUGH.
You must sit here and I'll stand behind you to watch.
(*She sits at the table and begins to draw the view. The intimacy is evidently ripening fast.*)

KATE.
Please correct me.

HUGH.
Oh, I'll be extremely strict and correcting.

KATE.
I mean to be a most docile pupil.

HUGH.
Oh, don't use that word. It's too formal. Say something nice—why not say comrade?

KATE.
Artistic comrade! . . . You mustn't touch my sketch.

HUGH.
Not for worlds. It would spoil it.

KATE.
Is that right?

HUGH.
Excellent. (*She begins to paint.*)

KATE.
I'm dreadfully nervous you know—being watched by a real live master like you.

HUGH.
Don't say that. I'm a little nervous myself.
(*They babble on hardly knowing what they say, for love's coming stirs their thoughts to sweet confusion.*)

KATE.
Why ever should you be nervous ?

HUGH.
I don't know. It may be the day—or the joy of having a comrade like you. The weather since you arrived has been wonderfully sunny, hasn't it ?

KATE.
Yes—I've enjoyed it.

HUGH.
If you've enjoyed it, what word is there left for me ? The longest, happiest, sunniest week of my life—and yet, after all, it's gone. How quickly it's gone.

KATE.
For ever.

HUGH.
But we can have plenty more like it—or happier.

KATE.
Oh, no—we're going to Sorrento to-morrow.

HUGH.
Tell your father you can't go till your lessons are finished.

KATE.
Father's bored to death already. Newspapers take three days from England, and he doesn't know what his stocks are doing. How I hate those stupid stocks !

HUGH.
So do I ! I just leave mine alone and when they lay an egg, I'm glad enough to spend it.

KATE.
Is that colour right ?

HUGH.
(*Recovering something of the master.*) Yes—but try to generalise. See the thing as a whole and then pull

it together. Notice an exquisite pinkish tone under the blue of the sea, and then there are all sorts of subtle, delightful purple shadows—try a little rose doré.

KATE.
Rose doré ! What a pretty word.

HUGH.
And see what a pretty colour.
(*Squeezes it out for her.*)

KATE.
Everything is pretty about the lesson. I am so enjoying it. (*The Italian waiter comes in with a cloth preparatory to tea.*) That troublesome man's coming here to lay the tea.

HUGH.
Of course we can't be interrupted like this.

KATE.
(*Naïvely.*) It would rather spoil the sketch if we had to stop now—wouldn't it ?

HUGH.
Quite out of the question. (*To the waiter.*) Go away.

KATE.
I don't think he understands English.

HUGH.
Would you mind telling him to clear out—in Italian ?

KATE.
I don't quite know what it is in Italian.

HUGH.
Let me have a shot—*Non adesso.*

KATE.
Piu tarde.

SERVANT.
Comme ?

KATE.
That means that he can't understand us.

HUGH.
I'll knock it into him. *Andare.* (*Raising his voice.*) Do you understand *andare prestissimo* ?

SERVANT.
Ma perche, signiore ?

HUGH.
Don't *ma-perche* me any more, young man—or you'll find yourself (*pushing him out*) *ma-percheing* down on the floor in a minute. There ! now we've got rid of him for the present.

KATE.
I think this is the most beautiful place in the world.

HUGH.
Isn't it ? (*The artistic temperament mastering his well-bred economy of phrase.*) . . . So restful and shady and snug—perched up here with the dear little town, and the beach, and the whole embrace of the bay at our feet. Have you noticed its colours changing and mingling and merging from hour to hour—from day to day . . . from the moment the dawn wells up behind the mountains, to the quiet time when the stars peep out through the last flush that lingers over the west ? . . . I thought when I came I could have been perfectly happy —staying on week after week with nothing but that. But now——

KATE.
(*Flustered.*) Oh ! I'm making such a mess of the colour. The rocks have run into the sea. Could you get it right ?

HUGH.
But I wasn't to touch it.

KATE.
Oh, never mind that! I needn't confess it, you know.

HUGH.
(*Sits down by her and paints.*) No, we needn't confess. It shall be our own little secret.

KATE.
That's ever so much better. (*Proudly.*) My people will be frightfully scandalised at my change of style. But that makes it all the more *piquant*, doesn't it?

HUGH.
Rather!

KATE.
I mean to belong to your school in future.

HUGH.
A chosen disciple.

KATE.
And be an *impressionist*.

HUGH.
(*Tenderly.*) Why shouldn't we combine our impressions together?

KATE.
We might—to keep up the joke.

HUGH.
We will. We'll keep the joke up and going—why shouldn't we do all our work together?

KATE.
I should spoil it.

HUGH.
(*Dropping the brush.*) No. It would be the finest work in the world; for love would have mixed the colours.

KATE.
(*Murmurs.*) I don't understand.

HUGH.

(*Seizing her hand.*) Ah, yes, you do! for I love you—won't you come and paint with me always? Won't you be my wife?

KATE.

(*Drawing back.*) But this is so sudden. We've only known each other a week. You can't know your own mind in one short week.

HUGH.

(*With a lover's warmth.*) It doesn't take a week to know what one wants, when one wants it as much as I do.

KATE.

(*Frightened into sudden demureness.*) Well, it takes me longer than that. Besides you mustn't ask me; you must talk to father.

HUGH.

Must I?

KATE.

Of course.

HUGH.

And what will he say?

KATE.

I don't think he'll like it. But he always gives in when we take no notice of his objections. He has to.

HUGH.

And will you—dear—take no notice of his objections?

KATE.

He generally finds I don't.

(*A florid, presentable, rather stout woman is carried up from the town path by a couple of men in a* chaise-à-porteur. *She is followed by a middle-aged man —the kind of man who is cruelly described in the*

phrase, "he stinks of money," by people who would like to share the odour. He is mopping his head with his handkerchief. They are MR *and* MRS HINDE-FALKENER.)

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

(*With over emphasis.*) Oh, I'm thankful we're here at last. The exertion of the climb has simply prostrated me.

KATE.

But, mother, you've been carried up all the way.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

It's not kind of you, Kate, to twit me with my infirmities. Can't you understand that the strain on the nervous system of being hauled and jolted up the face of a cliff like that is far, far greater than the mere physical exertion of porterage!

KATE.

The men look very hot.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

What's it to them, I should like to know! Why, positively beneficial. It opens the pores and relieves the system. I only wish I were strong enough to relieve my system with healthy exercise. (*Rises from the chair which the men remove, quarrelling with* Mr HINDE-FALKENER *in the background over the payment.*) But I did at least hope that we should find tea awaiting us on our arrival.

KATE.

I sent it away.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

(*Indignantly.*) Gracious! why?

KATE.

I thought the laying of the cloth would interfere with my painting.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Of course! The older generation are not worth considering nowadays. (*To her husband.*) Give them a lira each, Robert, and then shake your head slowly to show them you don't understand their Italian. (*Turning to the men.*) Non speak Italiano. (*Looks at painting.*) Gracious! What a dreadful mess!

KATE.
It's my latest style.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*With heavy displeasure.*) Then you'll oblige me by immediately returning to your previous one. I can't have all your expensive lessons wasted. Only a studio girl who wasn't quite a lady could paint like that.
(*She seats herself slowly.*)

HUGH.
I'll go and hurry tea on, if you like.
(MR HINDE-FALKENER *finally gets rid of the men.*)

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
I wish you would. (HUGH *goes into hotel.*) It's most extraordinary that Miss Marsden isn't here to receive us. I hardly think it's courteous. I wouldn't have accepted her invitation if I'd had any spirits of wine left in my tea basket. I suppose we shan't escape that nephew of hers.

KATE.
He isn't a nephew, mother.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Pricking up her ears.*) Then what relationship is there, pray?

KATE.
None. She is so kind. She looks after him because he's ill.
(*The servant comes in and proceeds to lay the tea.*)

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Scenting a scandal, and anxious to share the discovery.*) Do you hear that, Robert? The young man Miss Marsden's always chasing about after isn't a relative.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Why should he be?

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Why should he be! The only excuse for such conduct would lie in the very nearest relationship.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Mildly.*) I don't know what young man you're talking about, my dear.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Gracious! Have you no eyes except for your stocks? Why, that very inconsiderate youth, of course, who keeps me awake all night with his teasing cough.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
But if he's ill, perhaps she looks after him.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Quite the outraged Mrs Grundy.*) There are different ways of looking after invalids, Robert. I never nursed a young man in that public, familiar way—not even my own son, when he chose to catch the measles at the unaccountable age of twenty-two. It's my duty to give her a delicate hint at once, for if she goes on like that much longer, I'm sure it will set people talking.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
I've no doubt, my dear, it will.
(MISS MARSDEN *comes in. She wears a hat and carries a basket of fruit.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
I'm so sorry I wasn't here when you arrived. I hope you haven't been waiting long.
(*She begins to pour out tea.*)

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Never mind us. It's my daughter's fault. She sacrificed our tea to her sketching—so like the girls nowadays.

MISS MARSDEN.
Sugar ?

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
If you please—and two or three extra lumps in the saucer. I always save them up for my tea basket. (HUGH *comes in and helps to hand cups, etc.* MRS HINDE-FALKENER *carefully puts her sugar in an envelope. In tones meant to convey an inner meaning.*) You're very partial to young people, I hear, Miss Marsden.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*On guard.*) I don't know that "partial's" exactly the word to use—but I sometimes prefer them to older ones.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
And you've nursed them a good deal in your time, I suppose ?

MISS MARSDEN.
I've both nursed in a hospital and in the East End of London.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Ah ! Then I dare say you could tell me, do you consider this poor young Italian's consumption is galloping ?

MISS MARSDEN.
A nurse, you know, must never express an opinion about a case. But I fear the doctor thinks him pretty bad—why ?

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*With an effusiveness intended to sound like overflowing*

kindness. She always imagines her manner recalls that of the late Queen Victoria.) Then do let me implore you, dear Miss Marsden, not to keep hanging round him so much in future. The doctors have lately discovered that phthisis is extremely infectious..

MISS MARSDEN.

(*With an air to quench impertinence.*) A trained nurse quite understands the duty of danger and the danger of duty—thank you. (*Turning to* MR HINDE-FALKENER.) And how do you like Amalfi ?

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

I'm utterly tired of the place—nothing to do except to be broiled in the sun.

MISS MARSDEN.

Have you been to Ravello ?

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

Yes, I wish, Robert, you'd go there and culture yourself on the Sarasenic influence in the architecture. I only wish I were strong enough.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

No time now. We're off to Sorrento to-morrow.

(ARTURO *strolls in from the town with an air of lassitude. He gets a cup of tea and then seats himself on the parapet at the back.*)

KATE.

(*Pleadingly.*) But surely we needn't go to Sorrento to-morrow, father ?

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

Certainly. How am I to operate on the Stock Exchange in an outlandish place like this, I should like to know ! Being here has simply spoiled my holidays. I've said Sorrento—I mean Sorrento—and when I put my foot down, it's down for good.

ARTURO.
Is Dr Furlan coming ?

MISS MARSDEN.
It's his day.

ARTURO.
Quite time he arrived. He's generally here before the post.

MISS MARSDEN.
Then it hasn't come yet.

ARTURO.
No.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
A doctor coming—how providential ! I've just had a dreadful shock. I've been bitten by one of these modern mosquitos that they say are malarial !

MISS MARSDEN.
Then I'd be careful if I were you. Dr Furlan's very severe on our feminine ailments. He's apt to call them hysteria.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Snorting.*) I should say it depends on the patient.

HUGH.
Does he talk English ?

MISS MARSDEN.
Yes. He studied for two years in London.

ARTURO.
Here he comes.
(DR FURLAN *comes up from the path. He carries his hat in his hand. He is a clever, kind, extremely keen-eyed man of about fifty.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Shaking hands.*) We were just saying you ought to be here. May I introduce you to our newcomers? (*Does so.*) And now you must let me give you a cup of tea.

DR FURLAN.
It sounds delicious. I'm awfully thirsty.

ARTURO.
Let me fetch a cup.

DR FURLAN.
Thanks—if you haven't a bucket. (ARTURO *goes into hotel. The* DOCTOR *standing by* MISS MARSDEN *addresses her in a low voice.*) How is he to-day?

MISS MARSDEN.
(*In a low voice.*) Rather low; he talks about going to-morrow.

DR FURLAN.
(*Expansively; but watching her narrowly.*) Capital! My prescription — best thing in the world for him. I was afraid we shouldn't get him to move. You'll miss him, though.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Trying to smile.*) What does that matter? You must send me another patient.
(ARTURO *returns with a cup.*)

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Any news?

DR FURLAN.
Here is the *Corriere di Napoli.* It's this morning's evening paper. (*Hands it.*)

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
I can't be expected to read these incomprehensible Italian rags. (*Hands it on to* ARTURO.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
But surely you've some news to give us. Where are the King and Queen ?

DR FURLAN.
At Venice, I think.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*In the tone of Mrs Grundy addressing a Hottentot.*) I don't mean yours. I'm speaking of *ours* of course—naturally! The best people are away, I suppose ?

DR FURLAN.
They're all at Sorrento, bathing.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
I thought so. I'm sure it's a smart place—quite our style. So different from Amalfi !

DR FURLAN.
The middle classes are bathing at Possilippo. The lower classes have thrown off their clothes, and are in the sea naked all along the Chiaja. . . . My patients were all so well that I was able to get away here for the night, to cool. But as I climbed up with the sun on my back, I couldn't help thinking that I was clambering out of the frying-pan into the fire.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Then do be careful not to catch a chill sitting out here. (*Rising.*) I can feel one striking me at this moment. Come, Kate—excuse my taking the remains of the milk Miss Marsden, I always keep it over from meals for my tea basket.

(*She takes the milk jug and goes off followed by* KATE *and her husband.*)

DR FURLAN.
You find they add to the gaiety of the hotel ?

MISS MARSDEN.
They increase its variety. The exact type of English

who prevent our being as beloved on the Continent as we think we deserve to be.

HUGH.

(*With conflicting feelings.*) Anyway—they spend a great deal of money. They ought to be loved—in Italy! (*To* MISS MARSDEN.) Are you staying on much longer?

MISS MARSDEN.

I don't know. My plans are very uncertain. You see I'm a lonely woman without any definite ties or duties. Three months ago, when my health broke down from nursing too hard, I was ordered abroad for complete rest and change. A single lady with a slender income can't racket about like a young man. I'm here *en pension*. (*With a sigh.*) I'm always somewhere *en pension*!

DR FURLAN.

You must have a lot of time on your hands. Try to do a little writing for the Magazines.

MISS MARSDEN.

I'm far too stupid for that. I haven't any ideas. . . . I believe I was meant for a nurse, if I was meant for anything. . . . Sometimes I fancy I should like to become a lady-nurse and take care of little children. They at least learn to love you, however stupid you are. But of course my sisters would think it *infra dig.* "Another of Elizabeth's crazes," they'd say to each other.

DR FURLAN.

No, surely!

MISS MARSDEN.

Yes! An unmarried woman must always be studying the family dignity, for fear her brothers-in-law should feel it incumbent on them to remonstrate. . . . Her liberty is a mockery—like everything else.

HUGH.

(*Changing the subject.*) It's pleasant here as the day grows cooler, isn't it? Let us linger on for a little over tea; though our milk has been commandeered. Perhaps it's the last time we shall all have tea together.

ARTURO.

Yes, the last time. (MISS MARSDEN *tries to speak but cannot.*) I see the boy with the letters. He's lying at full length behind a stone in about a square foot of shade. (*Calls.*) *Ragazzo! portate presto le lettere—presto.*

DR FURLAN.

Lazy dog—no wonder the post is so late.

(*The boy comes in. He gives a packet to* ARTURO, *which he pockets, a letter to* HUGH, *which he opens and reads, and a letter to* MISS MARSDEN. *But she ignores it and fixes her eyes on* HUGH. *Pause.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

(*At last.*) Will you have some grapes, Mr Brownlow?

HUGH.

Thanks. (*He comes across and she whispers in his ear.*) (*To* ARTURO.) What have you got by post?

ARTURO.

(*With emphasis.*) Nothing.

HUGH.

(*Not to be put off so.*) Oh, nonsense! You'll make us inquisitive in a minute.

ARTURO.

(*Hesitating.*) Tobacco—from England.

(MR HINDE-FALKENER *comes hastily in.*)

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

Letters! Letters! None for me—and the market weak and feverish when my last wire came.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*To* ARTURO.) You must give Mr Brownlow a pipe full out of your packet.

HUGH.
You must—you shall.

ARTURO.
(*Disconcerted and obviously hesitating.*) I will—perhaps —presently. (*Goes into hotel.*)

HUGH.
(*Cheerfully.*) I'm coming to fetch it now, old chap. (*Follows him.*)

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Tobacco! tobacco! I wish some one would stand me even a pinch of some good genuine English mixture.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*With unintentional emphasis.*) Ah! I'm afraid we've no English tobacco here.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

(*The scene is the same. It is six p.m. and the late afternoon light is turning orange.* MRS HINDE-FALKENER *is seated reading a book and* DR FURLAN *is reading a newspaper at the back of the terrace.* MISS MARSDEN *comes in from the hotel.*)

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Now the British mother ruffled all over with alarm.*) I want to know all about this young man who sketches. I always forget his name.

MISS MARSDEN.
Mr Brownlow. He's an artist—a "painter," as they call themselves nowadays.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Has he private means ?

MISS MARSDEN.
Oh, yes, I believe so.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
In affluent circumstances ?

MISS MARSDEN.
I don't know.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Determined that* at *all hazards, things shan't go further if she can help it.*) It is to be hoped he is for his own sake, considering that he could never expect to sell the dreadful things he daubs on his blocks. I suppose he does

them for want of something better to do. I'm going to put a stop to his teaching Kate and spoiling her pretty style. I wish she wouldn't let him follow her about as he does. (*With intention.*) Though people following people about seems the fashion here. If I've spoken to her once, I've spoken to her a dozen times on the subject. But you might as well expect to wheedle the Marble Arch as influence one of the rising generation.

MISS MARSDEN.

But surely one can win their confidence by trying to share in their interests.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

If you'd only been married like me and had all the cares of a family on your shoulders, you'd find they didn't ask you to share their interests—they crammed 'em down your throat. (*Seized with the usual alarm of ladies on tour in Italy.*) But I must be hurrying in—it's deadly, isn't it, Doctor, to be out in this climate at the hour of sunset ?

DR FURLAN.

(*Calmly looking up from his paper.*) Oh, absolutely !

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

Isn't it dangerous for you and Miss Marsden ?

DR FURLAN.

(*Still more calmly.*) Oh, yes—I dare say. Perhaps we're immune. (MRS HINDE-FALKENER *hurries into the hotel.*) And how long has Mr Brownlow been here ?

MISS MARSDEN.

About a week. He came to paint, but he only dawdles—I fancy he's rather smitten with Miss Hinde-Falkener. When he isn't about with her he's with Arturo. I had hoped his company would have cheered the boy, for they

seem to be great friends already. But now, of course, Arturo says that he's going to-morrow.

DR FURLAN.
It's time he went.

MISS MARSDEN.
Why ?

DR FURLAN.
He's getting restless and discontented here. He wants bracing.

MISS MARSDEN.
You think so ?

DR FURLAN.
(*Sharply.*) I'm sure of it.

MISS MARSDEN.
I'm sorry he's going because I was able to look after him—more or less. He needs taking care of. (DR FURLAN *lights a cigar, but does not speak. After a moment's pause, she continues in a self-conscious voice which seems to ask for extenuation.*) I know you think me imaginative.

DR FURLAN.
Yes—to a certain extent.

MISS MARSDEN.
And often foolish.

DR FURLAN.
(*Protesting.*) My dear Miss Marsden—I won't admit that !

MISS MARSDEN.
Yes, you do ! And that makes it doubly difficult for me to confide in you. But I'm getting so uneasy about Arturo, I can't help myself. You noticed that mysterious parcel that came at tea time ?

DR FURLAN.
(*Coldly.*) I can't say I did—particularly.

MISS MARSDEN.
Now what do you imagine that it can be ?

DR FURLAN.
It might possibly be tobacco. He told us it was.

MISS MARSDEN.
No, it isn't—I feel sure it isn't! Didn't you notice how confused he got when he was asked ? It must be something else.

DR FURLAN.
It might be fifty things else. Perhaps it's a pair of curling tongs to curl his front hair. He's a very vain boy, as you may have observed.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Mystically, all self-consciousness gone before solicitude for the boy.*) I don't think so. It's sensitiveness, not vanity. And then he's really beautiful, isn't he ? He must know that! But I'm especially anxious about him to-night. Sometimes I have a kind of second sight when misfortune is drawing near. And to-day, I've had a warning. You may think me morbid—I don't care !—but I can't help feeling that if he leaves us to-morrow, it won't be for the Engadine.

DR FURLAN.
No ?

MISS MARSDEN.
No ! I can't help fearing that this parcel contains a pistol and (*half whispers*) that he meditates putting an end to his life.

DR FURLAN.
(*Folds his paper deliberately and comes down, seating himself near her.*) Will you allow me to speak to you quite frankly, Miss Marsden ?

MISS MARSDEN.
Yes.

DR FURLAN.
As though I were your medical adviser ?

MISS MARSDEN.
Certainly.

DR FURLAN.
(*Calmly—kindly—emphatically.*) You think too much of that boy !

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Astonished, scandalised.*) I !

DR FURLAN.
Too much about him, I mean ! You show your sympathy too unreservedly. It's very kind of you, but it isn't good for him. It makes him dwell on himself and fancy himself a martyr. His mind wants bracing as well as his body. And then I'm afraid of the reflex action of all this devotion on your own peace of mind.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Catching her breath.*) Mine !

DR FURLAN.
(*Very gently, like a doctor to a patient.*) Don't interrupt me—I know what I'm saying ! You yourself are nervous and overwrought, and so you fancy he's about to commit suicide. My dear Miss Marsden, it's because your own nerves are upset. He's no more likely to commit suicide than you or I. (*With hesitation.*) Indeed I could add that there might be more danger for you than for him.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Springing up—all her womanhood outraged.*) How dare you say such a thing to me ?

DR FURLAN.

You promised to listen if I spoke frankly. It was the truest kindness that made me do so.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Her indignation growing and mastering her will.*) And this is how a forlorn, unhappy woman who tries to cheer a dying lad is treated. . . . I know the uncharitableness of one's neighbours and the indiscretion of seeming to care for a man, woman, or child—if one's own position is exposed and friendless! A lonely woman should have no heart if she wishes to save its punishment. . . . I know that the world smiles at women such as I, and that is bitter enough to bear without being insulted. (*Hysterically.*) But I never expected to be told to my face that my unselfish kindness was merely a cloak for passion—and that I was the kind of woman who might kill herself in a fit of madness!

DR FURLAN.

Try to control yourself! (*He rises and takes her hand.*) Listen! You think I am hard on you. But believe me I don't wish to be so. I speak to you for your own good. (*Soothingly.*) I am a doctor; and as a doctor I should like to prescribe for you. I want you to let your thoughts dwell on something else. Forget the boy—he'll be gone to-morrow. If you can't do that, go back to London and (*with more than professional kindness*) take up nursing again. I like to think of myself as a true friend of yours—and as a true friend, you must forgive my adding a word or two more. I want you to give up taking (*hesitates*)—what you take for your nerves.

(HUGH *comes in. He wears a dark suit.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

You must excuse me. You've gone too far.

(*She is calm once more, and with the pained dignity of a woman who has been misrepresented and hurt, she walks into the hotel.*)

DR FURLAN.

(*Quietly reseating himself and re-lighting his cigar.*) I have just made an enemy.

HUGH.

(*Looks towards the house. The* DOCTOR *nods.*) How ?

DR FURLAN.

By trying to do her a kindness. The only help I could offer was some good advice. That is the surest way of making a woman your foe. If one feels an especial sympathy one should never show it—as Miss Marsden herself has just told me.

HUGH.

I think something must have upset her to-night. She is generally so very calm and self-possessed. I have never seen her at all excited before.

DR FURLAN.

(*Blurting out the truth with a certain impatience.*) Of course she's upset ! The boy's departure is more than enough for that.

HUGH.

She has been most kind to him. She takes a great interest in his health.

DR FURLAN.

Interest in his health, my good man ! She naturally takes an interest in his health when she's over head and ears in love with him.

HUGH.

(*Getting up and walking about—much scandalised.*) I don't believe it.

DR FURLAN.

You don't ?

HUGH.

(*Indignantly.*) It's a calumny even to suspect such

a thing of an English lady. . . . You don't know them. . . . They don't lose their hearts like that. They've too much niceness of feeling and self-control. . . . I dare say your hot-blooded Italian women may—I know nothing of that. But you must excuse my saying your (*turning on him*) nation is too fond of jumping to such conclusions about other people. Surely you don't share these scandal-mongering servants' fancy, that if a sensible woman takes the slightest interest in a man, she must be in love with him. Why, the very idea is the limit!

DR FURLAN.
I don't say in all cases.

HUGH.
The whole notion's old-fashioned—exploded! We've dropped it in England years ago.

DR FURLAN.
Please understand me! (*As though diagnosing a case.*) The words "in love" may be taken in so many senses. I don't imply that the poor woman has what would be called an amorous infatuation for the lad. She may have—I don't know! She calls it, of course, a motherly interest. She probably really imagines it's that. It would wound her self-respect—her sense of feminine delicacy and the fitness of things, to admit the contrary. For when women choose—they have a surprising faculty for self-deception. But though she would never admit to herself she could have a *tendresse* for any one, I tell you she has a *tendresse* all the same.

HUGH.
(*With the naïvité of the average man's point of view.*) But she can't have! She's much too old. She's nearly forty.

DR FURLAN.
(*Smiling.*) Why not? It makes it absurd, of course, but it doesn't prevent its existence. We may be thankful it isn't the waiter.

HUGH.

But Arturo's ill — he's engaged — they could never marry.

DR FURLAN.

My dear man what has marriage to do with it ? With this kind of woman—gentle, affectionate, clinging, domestic, and all that—love is part of her nature. I don't mean a physical passion, but the something which works and works in her brain with the bitterness of the unattainable. It's the instinct of sex, suppressed.

HUGH.

(*Being an Englishman and a gentleman, he is naturally shocked.*) I dare say she would like a little attention and petting. But she can't be in love—not in love like I am. Why, she must know she would be merely making a fool of herself. She must know the very idea's absurd. I won't believe it! (*He sits.*)

DR FURLAN.

Of course she does. It's that that adds to her sense of humiliation. But do you think "knowing" would stop it ? Not a bit! There are many women who —as they grow older and realise that their love-time is slipping away, if it has not already passed—are filled with this craving to pour out affection on some one. They know it's too late now to hope to win it from others. And the depths of their womanly nature are stirred to give out something they never can get. It amounts to an irresistible instinct. The sensible ones take to practical work—nursing or tending the poor—or painting in art schools. . . . The others !—well, the others generally take to adoring pet animals or sink into exigent invalids.

HUGH.

(*With youthful scorn.*) You seem to know a lot about women.

DR FURLAN.

I do—almost too much perhaps. I've studied them—professionally.

HUGH.

(*Warming to eloquence.*) If it's true, then don't you think it's awfully sad — an affectionate nature, which from some rotten reason, some small defect or unavoidable circumstance, finds it mayn't give its love with any hope of return—perhaps mayn't properly give it at all?

DR FURLAN.

(*Also warming.*) Yes! Like so many other things in the world, it is sad to piteousness. Especially as the victims can't expect to get sympathy from a soul. They daren't even ask it. Miss Marsden knows she is making a fool of herself. And yet she can't resist the impulse. The bitterness of her mortification lies in that. (*Pulling himself up.*) But come! it's no use our trying to mitigate the sadness of things by being sentimental. They are as they are. If we can't mend them we must accept them. Miss Marsden knows that as well as we do. She would school herself to accept them if she wasn't so unbalanced.

HUGH.

(*Coming gallantly to her aid once more.*) I can see she is sensitive and emotional, but I shouldn't have called her unbalanced.

DR FURLAN.

She's worse! She's extremely neurotic, if you know what that means.

HUGH.

I don't exactly — except that it's the name given nowadays to everything unsatisfactory. All the disagreeable women in Ibsen's plays are said to be suffering from it. But Miss Marsden isn't in the least like an Ibsen heroine. She's rather conventional and old-fashioned in her ideas, I should say.

DR FURLAN.

(*Diagnosing the case with clinical impartiality.*) That

has nothing to do with it. Notice her conversation. It's I—I—I all the blessed time. She's one of those people who only care to discuss their own symptoms and sufferings and adventures and charms. They must appear interesting at all hazards.

HUGH.

(*Walking about restlessly.*) I dare say she's only a little run down from overwork. I think you're too hard on her.

DR FURLAN.

You make a mistake! I like Miss Marsden extremely. It's because I like her, and am sorry for her—I want to help her all I can. If you'll do the same, she'll have two good friends instead of one. But remember—I'm a doctor, and therefore perhaps see more clearly than you could—if one really wants to help a person, it's no use shutting one's eyes to the facts, however unfortunate.

HUGH.

(*Doggedly.*) But I don't see the facts.

DR FURLAN.

(*Gets up.*) Even you must have noticed her thirst for sensation—the way she nurses a pathetic idea—the attempt to persuade herself it contains the germs of a tragedy. She has worked up a first-class sensation to-day—poor woman! It's almost a shame to repeat it. (*Smiling indulgently.*) But she's got into her head the idea that her youth is about to commit suicide, and that some parcel or other from Naples contained a pistol.

HUGH.

Really! (*Doubtfully.*) I hardly know what to say —honestly, I don't think it was tobacco.

DR FURLAN.

Oh, it was probably some patent cough mixture. She, poor soul, will lie awake all night expecting to hear the dreadful report, and wondering every moment if she

oughtn't to rush into his room and knock up the pistol. While all the time he is peacefully slumbering and the cough mixture placidly stands on his washing-stand. That is an instance of how she tortures herself about nothing. It's part of the irony of the illness. (*At last impatient.*) The whole notion is such pathetic folly—I've hardly patience to speak of it.

HUGH.
Well—I don't agree with you!

DR FURLAN.
What we have to do is to try to keep her calm and cheerful—that at least you'll agree to.

HUGH.
(*Dissatisfied.*) We seem to have drifted into a lot of gossip although we've only met for the first time to-night.

DR FURLAN.
I've been perfectly open with you because I know you really wish to befriend them both. The only way to do that is to speak with absolute frankness—as we have done. (*A bell sounds.*) There's the dressing bell so I'm off.
(*He retires to the hotel.*)

HUGH.
(*To himself.*) Well I'm blowed. (*Slowly fills his pipe.*) He means to be kind to her. He means all he says. I wonder if there's anything in it! (*He lights his pipe.*) But I'm blowed all the same. (*The sunset glow begins to light up the scene and gradually increases in brilliance to the end of the act.* MR HINDE-FALKENER *comes in with a long Italian cigar in his mouth. He keeps on striking matches and tries to light it in vain.*) The dressing bell's gone, but we've lots of time yet.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
I can't get this damned piece of stick they call a cigar here, to light.

HUGH.
May I give you a pipe of English tobacco? I've got some here.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Right oh! (*Fills his pipe.*) I've smoked all I was able to smuggle. My wife's pockets were so full of quarter-pound packets of tea, she couldn't assist me. (*Begins to smoke and sits.*) That's better. I haven't felt so at-homey and natural since I left England. I could fancy myself at this moment sitting comfortably in the train going down to Chislehurst after a good day in the City.

(*He feels soothed and his thoughts naturally turn to that financial power-house—his office.*)

HUGH.
You leave to-morrow.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Sorrento—sounds stylish and lively, doesn't it? Plenty of moneyed people there, they tell me; the next day, Naples. The day after that Cook takes us up Vesuvius in the morning and round Pompeii in the afternoon. Then off for home! I hate wasting time—enjoying the place as the ladies call it—after you've seen everything that you've got to.

HUGH.
You don't like travelling?

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Hate it! All travelling's waste of time. Give me a good hard day in the City!

HUGH.
(*Desperately, fearing the moment is inopportune.*) I want to ask you a question.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Well?

HUGH.
(*Hesitating.*) It's rather a delicate question.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
Fire away. I'm not over squirmish—is it about your investments ?

HUGH.
Not exactly. (*His sense of honour forbids his drawing back.*) I want you to be so kind—so good—as to let me pay my addresses to your daughter.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Thoroughly roused.*) Certainly not. Why, you're a perfect stranger ! I wonder you dare broach such an idea to me !

HUGH.
Please don't say that. Shall I tell you all about my people and prospects, which aren't so bad after all ? Besides I'm awfully in love with your daughter.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Putting his foot down.*) What has that got to do with it, pray ? You're not the first young man in that state I've had to cart. Come now !—how much a year do you make by painting ?

HUGH.
Not very much as yet, I'm sorry to say.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
I should think not, judging from what I see ! Come ! —You're not a regular exhibitor at the Royal Academy, are you ?

HUGH.
I'm afraid not. I——

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
I thought so ! I suppose they won't hang your unfinished stuff.

HUGH.

I don't give 'em the chance. Though I have had things there before now, when I was young. At present I send to the New English Art Club and the Paris *Salon*—the new one.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

That sounds bad. It's bohemian! It's not business! Any young man who had a real instinct for business would stick to the Academy. My picture dealers advise me to buy nothing under the work of an A.R.A., and they ought to know what's what.

HUGH.

I fear that art hasn't much to do with business.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

No. (*Decisively.*) But business has a great deal to do with marriage. (KATE *comes in from the hotel.*)

KATE.

Oh, father, here you are!

HUGH.

I've been speaking to Mr. Hinde-Falkener—about—about us.

KATE.

Oh, have you? I'm so glad—and what does he say?

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

(*With the heavy dignity of a scandalised parent.*) I'll repeat what I say—presently when we're in private.

KATE.

Oh, no, father! Better now, when I've got Mr Brownlow here to help me.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

But, my dear, there is no further explanation possible. I have told Mr Brownlow that I can't sanction the idea for a moment.

KATE.

(*Coaxingly, putting her arm round her father's shoulder.*) Oh, not for a moment, father—but for always. You would listen, wouldn't you?—if I asked you prettily. There can't be any harm done by your hearing an explanation.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

(*With signs of melting.*) When I say no—I mean no.

KATE.

And when I say "yes," I mean you to say "yes," too.

HUGH.

(*With proper feeling.*) I love your daughter, sir, and I think she loves me.

KATE.

Oh, not quite yet, Mr Brownlow. . . . I only like you as yet . . . but perhaps some day I may find myself feeling the other thing.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

(*Compromising.*) I'll go as far as to say I'll consider it. That's safe enough. For I'm sure your mother'll come down on you like a cart load of bricks. She's as hard as nails on this kind of thing.

HUGH.

Even if I were to offer to paint her portrait?

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

Oh, that would put her up on her hind legs at once. Between ourselves, it would smooth the way if the Chantry Bequest now, were to purchase one of your pictures.

KATE.

Oh, thank you, father. You couldn't be kinder than that. They'd be sure to—wouldn't they, Hugh?—as soon as they'd seen your work.

HUGH.

(*Doubtfully.*) I—don't—know! (*With a sudden change of voice.*) I hope so!

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

(*Bell sounds.*) Goodness! there's the *table-d'hôte* bell. We must be off to dress. This tobacco is extremely good.

HUGH.

It's Stock Exchange Golden Bull Point.

(MR *and* MISS HINDE-FALKENER *go into hotel.* HUGH *stands and faces the view—in a day-dream.*)

ARTURO.

(*Coming out of hotel.*) Oh, Hugh, there you are!

HUGH.

Yes. I'm taking notes of the sunset—or dreaming—or something.

ARTURO.

(*Petulantly.*) Well! I wish you'd turn round. I can't talk to your back hair.

HUGH.

(*Turning.*) There you are. A full front pose. Now, then, fire away.

ARTURO.

(*Penitent in a moment.*) I'm afraid I'm rather captious to-night. The truth is, I'm in very low spirits. So you must excuse me if I seem cross.

HUGH.

(*Sits on parapet at back.*) Of course, old man. Every one seems to be more or less upset this evening. It's the weather. It's so oppressive and thundery. I suppose the electricity has affected our nerves. (*Determined to get back to the safe footing of common-sense.*) Let us forget ourselves and try and talk about something amusing.

ARTURO.
Yes—yes. Tell me something to take my thoughts away from my troubles.

HUGH.
Did I ever tell you the story of the painter who tried to pose seven models at once.

ARTURO.
No! (*He is not listening.*)

HUGH.
Well, the situation was delicate; there was a chap who wanted to paint a classical crowd in a bath. So he engaged seven models—four men and three women. He meant them all to pose together. Well——

ARTURO.
(*Interrupting.*) Were you ever engaged to be married?

HUGH.
Ever engaged? I should rather think so. Have you guessed it? I've been engaged for a couple of hours.

ARTURO.
You don't say so!

HUGH.
To Miss Hinde-Falkener.

ARTURO.
(*Trying to be sympathetic.*) I'm delighted.

HUGH.
(*With gusto.*) When I say I'm engaged I don't mean the common-place public thing. I mean something choicer than that. We've got a little private understanding all to ourselves.

ARTURO.
Then you can appreciate how I feel. I'm engaged to a girl I can never marry. My health is too bad. And

yet we love each other—we can't bear to break it off. But I ask myself day and night is it fair to her—isn't it my duty to break it off ? The more I really love her—the greater the duty—don't you think so ?

HUGH.
It's so difficult to decide ! Suppose you break it off ? You suffer, to leave her free, and she suffers through her very freedom. Suppose you remain engaged ? For the time you're both happy, and yet, perhaps, you imperil her future happiness. I don't like to advise, but I think you're right.

ARTURO.
I know I ought to be out of her way. I'll break it off to-night.

HUGH.
Don't be in a hurry—wait a few days.

ARTURO.
No, I'll break it off to-night.

HUGH.
Why to-night ?

ARTURO.
(*Sharply.*) Why not ?
(MISS MARSDEN *comes in from the hotel.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
The *table-d'hôte* bell has rung some time.

ARTURO.
It's too stuffy in there for eating—I'm going to stay out here.

MISS MARSDEN.
Do you catch the early train at La Cava ?

ARTURO.
(*Quite vaguely.*) Yes.

MISS MARSDEN.
Have you ordered your carriage ?

ARTURO.
(*Still uninterested.*) Dear me, no ! I quite forgot it.

MISS MARSDEN.
I'm going in to speak to the porter. I'll order it for you. Six o'clock, I suppose, will be time enough.

ARTURO.
(*Hardly knowing what he is saying.*) I suppose so. (MISS MARSDEN *goes in.* *To* HUGH.) Don't leave me—she'll be back in a moment. I can't bear sentiment, and she'll want to say good-bye.

HUGH.
Why don't you go to your room if you want to be quiet?

ARTURO.
(*Seeming demoralised. He speaks nervously—feverishly.*) Not there—not yet ! My room's like a furnace. I should only lie on my bed and toss and toss, and stifle for want of a breath of fresh air. I must stay out here in the cool for a little longer.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Coming back.*) The porter says it's too late to order a carriage.

ARTURO.
It doesn't matter. Thank you all the same.

HUGH.
(*Going.*) Well, I'm off to *table-d'hôte*—no time for dressing. I think for once I shall manage to be one of the smart people who are always a quarter of an hour after time. (*To* ARTURO.) Aren't you coming ?

ARTURO.
(*Moving.*) Yes. (HUGH *goes.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

(*To* ARTURO.) Would you mind, a moment? (ARTURO *hesitates.* MISS MARSDEN, *with the quietude of perfect self-control.*) We may not have another chance of seeing each other alone, so I want to say good-bye to you now.

ARTURO.

(*Taking her at her word.*) Good-bye, then.

MISS MARSDEN.

I want to speak to you for a minute or two. Shall we sit down? (*They do so.*) It is kind of you to stay, especially as you fear I am going to give some good advice. But don't be afraid! I'm not even going to tell you how sorry I am you're leaving us. I merely want to tell you something. I was brought up in an unusually happy home with two dear sisters. They both married and I lived on with my mother till about four years ago, when she died, and I was thrown on the world with a slender income and no home. . . . My sisters and I are devoted to each other, as people would say, which in reality comes to this—they enjoy having me for a visit now and then. As is only natural, their interests and affections are centred in husband and children. I wouldn't have it otherwise for the world. But at the same time I'm not necessary to their happiness. Why should I be? And I mustn't make them necessary to mine. . . . I can fancy each of them saying to her husband, "It's time we asked Elizabeth to stay with us; poor thing, she's so lonely." And I can hear her husband, "Need we have her again so soon?" And then my sister's reply, "I know it's a bore, but I really think it's a duty. She does so enjoy it, poor thing."

ARTURO.

Why should they talk like that if they're fond of you? Italians wouldn't—they've too much heart.

MISS MARSDEN.

It's perfectly natural—and I don't complain. But it's also natural I should be afraid of taxing their affection too often. . . . I don't suppose you could conceive the loneliness of not having a single person's happiness dependent on your love. (*With a touch of pathos.*) But I think another woman would understand.

ARTURO.

(*Recalling his attention.*) And you took to nursing—didn't you ?

MISS MARSDEN.

Yes ! I was determined to do something useful, to give myself an aim in life, as it is called. So I threw myself feverishly into nursing till my health broke down, and I found myself ordered here. (*Her voice changes.*) And this leads up to what I really came out to say to you. (*With increasing intensification.*) While I was working among the poor I suffered from insomnia and took to narcotics. I haven't even yet quite freed myself from their terrible bondage. But I am nearly cured. A great shock did it. (*Intensely.*) Were you ever pulled up suddenly, and forced to look death straight in the face ?

ARTURO.

(*Startled.*) Yes, you forget—I am doing that continually !

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Turning upon him.*) But suddenly—here—now ! . . . Have you ever been in the dreadful position of having to say to yourself, " In five minutes I shall probably be in eternity " ?

ARTURO.

(*Confused, almost breaking down.*) I have sometimes

fancied . . . I have thought before now . . . I should almost welcome the sight of the end. (*With tears in his voice.*) I am so tired of this miserable, broken life—half life—half death.

MISS MARSDEN.

I had often thought so too. But when the moment comes, it's different. One night, when very tired, I took an over dose of morphia. . . . Life seemed to ebb away. . . . I lost my power of seeing colour—all the beautiful palpitating life round me turned in a moment to a ghastly black and white, like an unnatural picture stealthy with livid movement. There was a buzz in my ears which drowned the voices round. I felt my consciousness shrinking and sinking back from my body down into space. Through it I heard the doctor say, "I give her five minutes more." It may have been the force of will or the ether they injected, but I recovered. (*She rises. Her voice has the grip of a drowning man.*) And now I want you to think what it means when one is forced to say to one's self, "In five minutes—one minute—fifty seconds—I shall have ceased to be. I shall have been torn from my body as you might tear a letter from its envelope. . . . I shall have left the world as one leaves a warm-lit home, to go forth for ever into the darkness, and I shall be what? . . .Who knows?"

ARTURO.

(*Evading her meaning.*) And yet when one is tired of life, the prospect of death seems sweet—like sleep to a tired child—crying.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*With passionate meaning but half suppressed.*) Yes, in dreamland; when one looks at it through the tender mists of distance. But think of it—eye to eye with you—eye to eye with you—here and now—you have never faced that.

ARTURO.

(*Rising, utterly disconcerted.*) Why do you talk so to me? You frighten me.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Her glance is magnetic. It seems to hold him bound.*) Because I want you to face the thing for a moment. (*She puts her hand on his, which is resting on the table.*) If you will only do so, I think you will give me something.

ARTURO.

(*Snatching his hand away.*) What?

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Every word like the tap of a hammer.*) That little parcel that came by post.

ARTURO.

Why should I? What has that to do with death?

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Letting herself go.*) You will give it me because I am a better friend to you than you are to yourself. Sometimes I am a clairvoyante, and to-night I can read your thoughts, or think I can. I believe I know what is in that parcel. I may be wrong, but give it me. We shall see who is right.

ARTURO.

(*Still struggling.*) I cannot.

MISS MARSDEN.

Give it me!

ARTURO.

Don't look like that. You are taking away my will!

MISS MARSDEN.

Give it! (*After a moment's mental struggle he suddenly gives her the parcel. She slowly opens it and discovers a small pistol and cartridges. She adds quite quietly*) Thank you. I will keep them for you (*and pockets them*).

ARTURO.

(*Seizing her hand and holding it.*) You have given me back my life in exchange.

MISS MARSDEN.

Ah, how happy we both ought to be to-night!

(*Their heads are dark against the sunset brilliance, but a smile of exquisite happiness flits across her face as the curtain descends.*)

ACT III.

(*The scene is the same. It is eight o'clock in the evening —dark; save for the last faint flush in the sky which gradually fades as time goes on. There is a lamp and two candles alight on the table.* KATE *is seated, looking out on the view, and* HUGH *is seated on the parapet near her. She is in evening dress, but he has had no time to change*).

KATE.
What a perfect night!

HUGH.
And yet there's no moon, nor fire-flies—only the stars.

KATE.
But the air is filled with the scent of August flowers. Listen! Nothing stirs—there is a sense of breathlessness in the air, as though all things watched.

HUGH.
There is something feverish in the stillness. Do you notice that bank of clouds coming stealthily up from the south? It means thunder before morning.

KATE.
It will cool the air. I think every one is a little over-excited this evening.

HUGH.
(*Softly.*) You and I, at least, dear, have earned the right to be over-excited, haven't we? What a wonderful

day. And now at last we're really engaged. Before dinner I feared it might be only a mutual attachment.

KATE.
We mustn't yet use the actual word out loud. But that needn't prevent us from knowing what we know in our secret hearts.

HUGH.
And it needn't prevent you calling me Hugh (*she shakes her head*), in a whisper.

KATE.
I did, by accident, to father.

HUGH.
And I may call you Kate ?

KATE.
Yes, if you do it by accident—in a whisper.

HUGH.
And what about the load of bricks ?

KATE.
If we give it a tip the other way it will fall on the toes of poor father. But you mustn't be alarmed if it shows signs of going for you first.

HUGH.
Not with you, dear, as my guardian angel.
(MR *and* MRS HINDE-FALKENER *both hasten out from the hotel.*)

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Kate, come in at once, do you hear ? What are you doing out there in the dark ?

KATE.
Planning such a surprise for you, mother.

MRS H NDE-FALKENER.
Nothing you could plan could surprise me.

KATE.
Well, then, I—and Mr Brownlow——

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*In horror.*) I knew it—I knew it!

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Somewhat relieved.*) Oh, well, my dear, if you knew it, that's all the better. It relieves me of the duty of telling you that our young friend here has just made a proposal for Kate's hand in marriage.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Because maternal instinct warned me of my cherished child's danger. Robert, you are not relieved of the responsibility of having connived at this plot. And let me tell you (*to* HUGH) once and for all, that I put my foot down and veto the very idea, Mr—Mr—I always forget your name.

HUGH.
Brownlow.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Fluently.*) I shall never sanction my daughter's marriage with a man whose very name I don't know —and can't remember. A mere stranger who paints in —I must say—not a very gentlemanly way—and whose general conduct seems to correspond with the impudent daubs he calls pictures. (*Turning on* HUGH.) We don't even know your prospects.

HUGH.
(*Gravely.*) Allow me to make a list of them.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
Excuse the frankness !—but we don't even know who you are.

KATE.

I do! but if that's your feeling about it, mother, I suppose we must postpone putting it in the *Morning Post.*

HUGH.

We were quite prepared not to share our happiness with the world at present.

KATE.

(*Almost bantering.*) Because I thought it might take you a little time to get acclimatised to the idea.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

(*With natural indignation.*) Do you hear that, Robert? If I'd spoken to my mother like that, she'd have shut me up by myself in a dark room with nothing but bread and water—she would, I'm certain. Why, she actually had to threaten me with a whipping before I consented to marry you.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

(*Tacking gingerly.*) Yes, yes, my dear, quite possibly—she doubtless knew what was for your good. But you see that was in the last century, and times have changed since then. Not that I don't agree with you in the main. I've not given my consent—oh, dear no! I've only said I won't unconditionally forbid the thing. It must just be in abeyance for—let us say six months.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.

Let us say much longer while we're about it; let us say nothing less than a year! And mind, there must be no communication whatever on either side during the interval!

HUGH.

I shall make it a point to respect your wishes. I may take it for granted that for the present, then, it's what's called an "understood thing."

KATE.
A tacit engagement.

HUGH.
A virtual engagement.

MRS HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Growing still more irritated.*) Don't harp on that beastly word. There's no engagement. And the very first thing I shall do on returning to Chislehurst is to see if I can't arrange a more gratifying match for you. (*Magnanimously.*) I've sacrificed my whole life to your happiness, and I'm not going to begin to think of my own comfort now. (*Goes into hotel*).

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
She's taken it better than I expected.

KATE.
(*To* HUGH.) It will come all right if we turn mother's thoughts in another direction. That's only her way of giving us her congratulations.

(MISS MARSDEN *comes out from the hotel; there is colour in her cheeks and a new vivacity in her manner. She wears an unexpectedly pretty dress.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
I've heard the good news; may I offer congratulations?

HUGH.
No, I don't think you may at present; many thanks all the same.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
(*With emphasis.*) This unfounded report must be publicly contradicted. It has already given us all a great deal of pain. The mere rumour of such a thing must be kept dark for at least a year. (*To* HUGH.) I rely on you.

HUGH.

I promise to do what you wish on my honour, sir. And let me thank you for your kindness in sanctioning the affair so far.

KATE.

And I'll promise to tell no one, except one or two of my dearest friends in the strictest confidence.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.

(*Discreetly.*) Well, Mr Brownlow, as we're not to have the pleasure of meeting again for a year, suppose you and I take this opportunity of having a little chat about your affairs.

HUGH.

Certainly, delighted.

(*They stroll off to the left arm-in-arm.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

(*To* KATE.) Now we're alone you must let me tell you how glad I am to be able to wish you every happiness.

(*Kisses her.*)

KATE.

(*Overflowing with young love's happiness.*) Yes, I'm quite silly with a new kind of beautiful joy. It's sweet of you to sympathise with us.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*Tenderly—gently.*) Oh, my dear! don't fancy because I'm an old maid I haven't a heart for the blessings that come to others. I sometimes think that if we were really self-forgetful, our neighbour's joys would be more to us than our own.

KATE.

How nice you're looking to-night.

MISS MARSDEN.

If so, it's because for once my youth has come back to me. I am thirty-six. I dare say that sounds quite old

to you. But you will find six and thirty years go so quickly—so terribly quickly. And even at thirty-six one doesn't always feel middle-aged. One still feels at times that one isn't past wanting—so many things.

KATE.
And you won't mind my saying I like your gown.
(*Pats it.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
It's the only gown I have ever bought because I thought it becoming. And I put it on to-night because I, too, am excited.

KATE.
Tell me about it.

MISS MARSDEN.
To-day I succeeded in helping some one out of a great trouble.

KATE.
Why don't you always dress in something as pretty as this?

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Deprecatingly.*) You mustn't talk so, or you'll make me vain, and that would never do, would it? For you don't know me. I'm just one of those lonely, insignificant women — with a limited income, few wants or pleasures and the grey hairs coming fast. . . . Their one wish is to slip through the world unnoticed . . . their only prayer to be allowed to do a little good, if they can, before they are laid in their soon-forgotten graves. But to-night——!

KATE.
Don't, Miss Marsden, please! I don't know why, but you make one want to cry!
(*Kisses her.* ARTURO *and* DR FURLAN *come up from the path at the back.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

Oh, no! We're going to be merry for once. It's our last evening all together.

ARTURO.

Can't we do something exciting?

DR FURLAN.

Certainly. We've been planning to drink a health of congratulation. It's an Italian custom.

KATE.

Oh, you mustn't do that.

DR FURLAN.

Really! (*Gallantly.*) Then in order not to be baulked of the pleasure of having a glass all round, we'll drink the health of an equally charming lady—I propose Miss Marsden's.

MISS MARSDEN.

(*With a touch of playfulness.*) Cruel man! If you weren't our doctor and therefore our master you wouldn't dare to propose to tease me like that. Never mind:—I claim my right as a woman, to pass on the toast. Will you order the wine? (*The* DOCTOR *goes into the hotel.*) We'll drink to the doctor.

ARTURO.

Capital. We planned the other toast on our way. We've been trying to cool ourselves with an after-dinner stroll down to the sea. Did you notice the summer lightning? It was such a sultry night when we started, but the weather is changing; there's an under swell in the sea, and a breeze is creeping up from the south—can't you feel it's chill?

(*The* DOCTOR *returns followed by the* SERVANT *carrying a tray with wine flask and glasses. Every one gathers round and fills a glass.*)

MISS MARSDEN.

Dr Furlan.

EVERY ONE.
(*Drinking and half laughing.*) Dr Furlan.

DR FURLAN.
(*With a mock bow.*) I am overwhelmed. And in return for your kindness, I'm going to try my luck once more. I propose we drink a health to Arturo and wish him God-speed on his journey.
(HUGH *and* MR HINDE-FALKENER *return.*)

HUGH.
Why, Arturo ! you're being fêted.

ARTURO.
It's only a sort of game because we're all so jolly this evening.

HUGH.
I think I must have a tumbler.
(*Meanwhile the company are filling their glasses*).

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
So must I, if I'm to get any satisfaction out of this local liquor. Water bewitched, I call it !

DR FURLAN.
Here's health and happiness to Arturo. We all hope he'll find health in the Engadine and happiness elsewhere.
(*They drink.*)

ARTURO.
Thank you all so much. And though I don't deserve such kind wishes, need I say I hope they will both come true.
(*The distant muttering of thunder is faintly heard.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
Listen !

DR FURLAN.
The storm !

MISS MARSDEN.
It's a long way off yet.

DR FURLAN.
But it's coming up fast. We had better be going in. (*Aside to* HUGH.) Watch her—she isn't quite herself to-night.
(*He goes into the hotel. The party move towards the door as they talk.*)

KATE.
We needn't go to bed just yet, need we ?

MISS MARSDEN.
No. We'll all meet in the drawing-room and have a round game. It will take up our thoughts. (*She goes out.*)

HUGH.
(*Putting* KATE'S *cape round her shoulders.*) The privilege of a twelve months' perfect stranger.

MR HINDE-FALKENER.
(*Calling back his daughter.*) My dear ! (HUGH *goes out*) he's much better off than I fancied. And Lord Dover's his uncle. I think when your mother hears that she'll divide that veto of hers by 365.
(*They also go into the hotel.*)

HUGH.
I don't want to play games and I can't go to bed.

ARTURO.
Stay and talk to me. The storm isn't coming here yet.

HUGH.
How gay Miss Marsden is to-night. She looked quite another person. Something has happened.

ARTURO.
She's a brick. She saved my life.

HUGH.
Not really !—how ?

ARTURO.
Haven't you guessed ?

HUGH.
No.

ARTURO.
That parcel you asked about, wasn't tobacco.

HUGH.
So I thought—but you told me it was !

ARTURO.
It was a pistol.

HUGH.
(*Astonished.*) And she said so ! While we were dense enough not to believe her. Sympathy must have given her second sight. I don't think you've ever appreciated her goodness.

ARTURO.
(*Rapidly—excitedly.*) I didn't before, but now I do ! She's been telling me all about her life. She has no one to care for—poor woman. And I was just the chap she could look after. I was going to shoot myself to-night. I swear I was !

HUGH.
(*In the tone of a sensible public school boy.*) You were a rotter !

ARTURO.
I thought it would end my engagement and my miserable struggles for life. I felt relieved when the pistol came—that decided it ! But when the sun set and the time arrived — somehow my mind began to change—I grew terrified. And then she stopped and spoke to me so kindly — she got it all out of me. I couldn't help confessing . . . she was so considerate —so good ! . . . I can't tell you what she said. But

I felt her care was a sacred thing—like my own dead mother's love. . . . And now that I'm saved, Hugh, I'm so happy; I feel better already! I know I shall sleep to-night.

HUGH.
(*For the moment dropping the reticence of good form.*) Thank her for all she's done for you! And if you ever pray, thank Heaven for having let her save you.

ARTURO.
I will—I will!
(MISS MARSDEN *comes out from the hotel. There is a wrap about her shoulders.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
Aren't you coming to join in the games?

ARTURO.
We're waiting out here as long as we dare—till the storm begins.

MISS MARSDEN.
Didn't you feel a drop, then?

HUGH.
If it's going to rain I may as well carry the lamp in.
(*He does so.*)

ARTURO.
Let me thank you once more for your kindness.

MISS MARSDEN.
Ah! don't do that. I'm so glad I was able to help you. Have you still made up your mind to go to-morrow?

ARTURO.
Yes.

MISS MARSDEN.
To——?

ARTURO.
To the Engadine. (*He sits at the table.*)

MISS MARSDEN.
It is better. (*Pause.*) Never mind the game. (*After a moment's pause.*) Perhaps we may never meet again.

ARTURO.
Ah, don't say that! (*A sudden question striking him.*) How did you see what was in my mind?

MISS MARSDEN.
(*With quickening breath.*) Can't you guess? You're not a child—you must know.

ARTURO.
Know what?

MISS MARSDEN.
(*With a low cry.*) Don't ask me—don't ask me!

ARTURO.
I won't.

MISS MARSDEN.
I must tell you. I can't hold back—God expects too much of a woman! (*She creeps to him.*) I knew it because I am fond of you. . . . What am I saying? And yet, why not? I have a right to be fond of some one. (*She stands behind him with her hands nervously resting on his shoulders. He turns his head.*) No, I don't want you to see my face. (*She stoops forward and blows out the nearest candle. The stage is now quite dark except for the light of the other. The floodgates of her passion are opening. She speaks with a kind of dreadful eagerness, hardly knowing what she herself is saying.*) You must listen! . . . There is a mother hidden somewhere in every woman's heart. I have never had husband or children. I have none to love. But the mother in me has been starved too long, too rigorously, and to-night she has risen up in rebellion and forced me to save you —my son—my son.

ARTURO.

(*Helpless.*) I'm so grateful. I wish I could do something for you.

MISS MARSDEN.

I think another woman would understand what I feel. But not a man. He couldn't—and you are a man! You will despise me. There is something strange—terrible happening in my soul to-night. . . . Every instant my ideas—principles—feelings are dissolving—going. An uncontrollable force is driving me on to speak . . . though I know that in speaking thus I lay myself open to every slanderous misconception — the scoff of the world—the shattering of my own poor self-respect. I cannot help it! (*For a moment her whole womanhood flames up in glory.*) I can control myself no longer. I know I ought to be overcome with shame—abashed. Well, I am abashed! . . . Yet if I were to die to-night through saying it, I think I should say it all the same—*I love you.*

ARTURO.

Like a mother?

MISS MARSDEN.

How should I know how a mother loves? I only know that I love you!—love you!—love you!

ARTURO.

(*Puzzled, confused, alarmed at the outburst.*) What do you want of me?

MISS MARSDEN.

I don't want anything—I only ask you to listen—and then forget. (ARTURO *moved by an impusle he cannot account for falls on his knees and kisses her hand. She stoops and kisses his forehead. There is a flash of lightning and a distant clap of thunder. She begins to understand what her words must mean. She suddenly realises her soul's uprising, and is overwhelmed with remorse and shame. She speaks suddenly—quickly.*) Get up! Don't kneel!

Forget this folly. For the moment I must have gone mad. I didn't mean what I said—I didn't know it was there—it came out in words—it isn't there now. I am sane once more. But oh! the horror of it—the horror! (*Her voice quieting.*) I shall never dare to look in your face again. We had better say good-bye now —for ever. Try to forgive me for everything I have done or spoken. (*Slowly and very sadly.*) . . . And think of me—if you ever think of me in future—as of a kind, though foolish woman who took such an interest in you (*trying to smile*) that she begged a parcel from you, you could do without.

(HUGH *comes in. He looks from one to another in astonishment.*)

HUGH.
I've come for the candles.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*Speaking in a curiously strange, intensified voice.*) Good-bye.

ARTURO.
It's only good-night now, I'm glad to say.

MISS MARSDEN.
You will be here in the morning?

ARTURO.
Yes—I don't go till after lunch.

MISS MARSDEN.
(*She hesitates as though changing her mind.*) Then let us only say good-night. (*Gently—lingeringly.*) Good-night.

(*They shake hands quietly and she goes into the house.*)

HUGH.
(*Eagerly.*) What's the matter.?

(*He lights the other candle.*)

ARTURO.
Nothing.

HUGH.
But with her ?

ARTURO.
She's frightened and shocked, poor soul ! God help her !

HUGH.
(*With curiosity.*) Why ?

ARTURO.
(*Embarrassed.*) Oh, the storm—you know—the thunder !

HUGH.
Nothing more ?

ARTURO.
No !—she'll be all right now.
(DR FURLAN *comes hastily out.*)

DR FURLAN.
(*To* ARTURO.) Go in at once, you silly fellow, or we shall have you laid up to-morrow. (ARTURO *goes in.*) He's over-tired to-night.

HUGH.
And well he may be. We've had a dramatic situation this evening. And it has proved that I was right—as I knew I was.

DR FURLAN.
What has proved what ?

HUGH.
It was a pistol, after all.

DR FURLAN.
(*Whistles.*) You don't say so !

HUGH.

Yes, and he meant to kill himself. So you see it wasn't all the diseased fancy of female hysteria, as you made out.

DR FURLAN.

Did he tell you himself ?

HUGH.

Yes, she had a talk with him alone, and she spoke so beautifully she drew a confession from him. She was right about the pistol, just as I'm right about her feelings towards him. You Italians—excuse my saying so—are too fond of implying that passion is the only motive which rules a woman. English women, at least, aren't like that. I swear she likes him—well ! loves him, if you must use the word—as a mother loves. And the feeling is all the stronger perhaps because it grew in the heart of one who is childless.

DR FURLAN.

You English are curiously cold-blooded—still even in England there's sex, you know—sex !

HUGH.

We won't discuss the temperature of the English blood. I only want you to understand her in future. (*Coaxingly.*) Come now, admit you wronged her, and that what we call " falling in love " had nothing to do with it.

DR FURLAN.

I should be only too delighted if I could believe I was mistaken, but she's odd this evening and—— (*A pistol shot is heard ; the following goes very fast.*) Great Heavens ! What's that ?

HUGH.

A pistol.

DR FURLAN.
But she took the pistol from him, didn't she ?

HUGH.
He said so !

DR FURLAN.
He must have told you so as a blind—perhaps the whole tale was a blind.

HUGH.
Let's go and see.
(ARTURO'S *voice calling*) Dr Furlan ! Hugh !

DR FURLAN.
He's only wounded—quick—I may save him yet.
(ARTURO *rushes wildly in.*)

ARTURO.
She's shot herself !

HUGH.
Who ?

ARTURO.
Miss Marsden.

HUGH.
Shot herself ?

ARTURO.
Yes ; shot herself dead !

HUGH.
Not dead !

ARTURO.
Dead !

DR FURLAN.
Horrible ! But I'm not surprised.

HUGH.

But why ?—Good God !—but why ?

ARTURO.

I think she has seen her soul naked. She couldn't bear the shame.

(HUGH *and the* DOCTOR *rush into the house. There is a faint flash of lightning.* ARTURO *drops into a chair and covers his face with his hands. Then follows a rumble of distant thunder. He looks up, scared, white, trembling, and half unconsciously blows out the remaining candle. And so in utter darkness the curtain slowly descends.*)

THE CLODHOPPER

CHARACTERS

THE RT. HON. THE EARL OF HELFORD, K.P.
THE HON. "DOLLY" DENNIS (his second son).
COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
RUPERT WARRINER (his nephew).
CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
GEORGE TRESISE, HENRY RETALLACK } (Farm labourers).
A FOOTMAN.
LADY GWENDOLEN DENNIS, LADY ELIZABETH DENNIS, LADY JANE DENNIS } (Lord Helford's daughters).
MRS MAJORIBANKS (his sister-in-law).
MRS TOLSON.
CONNIE WANTAGE (a cheese girl).
MARY ELLEN (a Cornish servant).

A Territorial Sergeant. Two Umpires. A Cyclist.
Officers. Villagers.

ACT I. At Lord Helford's house in Berkeley Square —April.

ACT II. At a farm in Cornwall—June.

ACT III. The same—July.

ACT IV. At Lord Helford's house—August.

ACT I

SCENE: *The Morning Room at* LORD HELFORD'S *in Berkeley Square. It has an air both of luxury and cultivation. There are bookcases against the walls and several tables spread with books and papers. It is about nine o'clock in the evening. The electric light is turned off, but* LORD HELFORD, *a hale and hearty old gentleman of about sixty, is discovered reading the* Quarterly Review *by a reading lamp.*

FOOTMAN.

(*Entering.*) Mrs Majoribanks has called, my lord. Are you receiving?

LORD HELFORD.

Yes. Where's Harris?

FOOTMAN.

Lady Jane has invited him to the theatre with some of the upper servants, my lord, to applaud her ladyship from the upper boxes, at her daybou.

LORD HELFORD.

(*Half-sighing.*) I hope it won't lower his tone. I believe it is not at all a desirable piece for a family butler to witness.

(*The* FOOTMAN *goes.* LORD HELFORD *rises and turns up the electric light.* MRS MAJORIBANKS *enters. She is a charming, bright-eyed woman of about forty-five, whose demure and almost child-like manner gives point to an exceptional sense of humour.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

(*Shaking hands.*) I've just run round to keep you company during this trying evening, Henry.

(*She sits.*)

LORD HELFORD.

(*Walking about.*) Thanks, Sophia. I was sure I might count on you in my darkest hour of humiliation.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Although dear Jane is coming out to-night at the theatre, I'm so recently back from India I haven't heard all the affecting details.

LORD HELFORD.

They are most deplorable. Every girl nowadays simply bleats to have a career. They madden me with their talk of spheres and scope. It's a kind of smart disease that has come in with appenciditis. And Jane has taken it badly. She has had a stage-stroke, Sophia! And some fool in her set has got her an engagement to walk on in a mediæval tragedy at the Whitehall Theatre.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

I'm glad it's no worse than that.

LORD HELFORD.

But it is worse than that! I'm told she not only walks on—under her own name, mind you!—but actually utters a sentence or two. And, if she should be successful, they've promised to let her understudy a page-boy.

(*He drops into a chair.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

(*With quick sympathy.*) Oh! how sad—such publicity! So mortifying for all of us. We'd better try to forget all about it and talk of something else. (*With a sudden change of tone.*) I've been wondering—— (*She jumps up.*) Oh, Henry—couldn't we—couldn't we just slip

round *incog.* and catch a glimpse of the dear from the very back of the pit? That would be rather neat and impromptu, wouldn't it?

LORD HELFORD.
Do not tempt me, Sophia! I've set my face like a flint against it. And as a paleolithic parent I can't possibly countenance the exhibition.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
I was hoping, Henry, that perhaps—perhaps the light of your countenance wouldn't carry from the very back of the pit. However, of course, if you're flint—you're flint! (*Sits.*) And what's Elizabeth doing?

LORD HELFORD.
You may well ask that. She was—what I believe is called—a bodice hand. She is now in a *blouse-atelier.*

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
It sounds rather natty—but still, I don't quite follow you.

LORD HELFORD.
Naturally! It's only the bitterest experience that has forced me to master their hateful jargon. A *blouse-atelier* appears to be a shop where they make the tops of dresses and not the bottoms.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Dear! It cuts one off from a lot—now doesn't it? I'm sure I should feel one was left rather out in the cold. Does she like it?

LORD HELFORD.
Loves it.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Isn't the work very hard?

LORD HELFORD.

Simply killing. That's a phase of the delirium. The harder the girls are slaved the more they enjoy it. Elizabeth says she'll fag and fag till she's made her mark as a first-class fitter. Her one ambition in life is to have a shop in a leading street with her name bulging out in French above it.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

And what is dear Gwendolen's walk in life ?

LORD HELFORD.

Poor Gwendolen—the maddest of all ! She wished to start as a " field hand " in order to work her way up to an agency.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

A field hand ! Really, Henry, my father would have sent me to a lunatic asylum if I'd breathed such a wish.

LORD HELFORD.

Yes, of course. But times are changed. So I sent her to a female Agricultural College instead.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

(*Rising.*) How lamentable it is—all the three dear girls on the prance ! Couldn't you depress them with antipyrin, or in some way throw cold water on their excesses ?

LORD HELFORD.

I do, I do. They live in a constant shower-bath of cold water—but it only seems to brace them.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

(*Firmly.*) You should sit on them, Henry.

LORD HELFORD.

(*Breaking out.*) Sit on them—how can *I* sit on them ? The sofa cushion in this establishment—is the statesman and father.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
No thought of husbands, I suppose ?

LORD HELFORD.
(*Rising.*) Husbands, my dear Sophia—husbands ! The new celibacy gospel of the higher maidenhood can't have reached you in India.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
I only asked because I had a notion that there was something on between Gwen and Rupert Warriner.

LORD HELFORD.
I should have thought the same in the mid-Victorian days of our youth. They're always about together. But if I even hint at what you call " something on " I'm shut up as though I'd committed an underbred solecism. Everything's so topsy-turvy nowadays, I really don't know. It may be the latest thing. It may be her way of courting him. I'm sure she's rude enough.

(*The* FOOTMAN *announces* MR WARRINER, *who enters and shakes hands. He is a good-looking man of about thirty with a distinguished air and beautiful manners.*)

RUPERT.
Any news yet ?

LORD HELFORD.
None.

RUPERT.
No news is good news, I presume.

LORD HELFORD.
NO news is good news to me—unless it were to hear that Jane has been cured of her mania by the freezing —if not the hissing process. But modern audiences won't cold-shoulder a woman. They're so provokingly soft-hearted.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

(*Who has been getting a little restless.*) I think I'll just slip off on the quiet—don't ask where.

LORD HELFORD.

" Standing room only," Sophia !

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

All the better for peeping. I should think it *infra dig.* to take more than a peep. It might encourage dear Jane unduly. It's only duty that takes me. One must keep up the solidarity of the family before the servants.

(DOLLY *comes in hastily. He is a pleasant-faced boy of about twenty-two, and is for once in a way quite excited.*)

DOLLY.

The second Act's over! She's come on. She's crossed the stage.

RUPERT.

Then she's crossed the Rubicon.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Has she spoken yet ?

DOLLY.

No ! Her great speech of nineteen words and a mark of interrogation comes off in the third act.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

What do you say to your sister's crotchets ?

DOLLY.

Providential ! You can't keep girls from poking their noses into mischief unless they've got something to fuss over—see ?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Then you back them up in their craze for careers of usefulness ?

DOLLY.

Rather !—so long as they don't expect me to be useful.

RUPERT.

Oh, my dear chap! your sisters are much too clever for that. You're the ornament of the family.

DOLLY.

I must be nipping back to the theatre. I've promised to give Jane my moral support.

LORD HELFORD.

I suppose every little helps. Though I shouldn't have thought you'd much to give.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

I'll be flitting too. A seat in your taxi, please, Dolly! I'm prepared to double the moral support on the spot. For I must catch some of those nineteen words even if I should miss the mark of interrogation.

(*They both go out.*)

RUPERT.

(*Sitting on the edge of the sofa.*) Where's Gwendolen? At the theatre?

LORD HELFORD.

Dear, no! She's much too deeply engaged in the study of poultry culture.

RUPERT.

Ah, I see. To every hen her daily egg.

LORD HELFORD.

I believe Gwendolen holds out hopes that in the future we may look for a daily couple. (*Sits.*) But then, she's in an especially sanguine mood this evening. Tolson has just offered her the post of under-bailiff on one of his farms in Cornwall. He's an old friend of mine, and he has promised to let her play round the place for the next few months. He doesn't think she can do much harm in the time. I can only hope his bailiff is an exceptionally competent man. Mrs Tolson's a bit of a

Tartar ; and I'm afraid dear Gwen will find that though men may be frying pans, women are sometimes the very —fire.

RUPERT.

I'm delighted for her sake—delighted ! But it puts us further apart than ever. You know, Lord Helford, how much I'm hoping some day she'll be my wife. (*Rising.*) Could a girl think of love when her mind's wedded to mangel-wurzels ?

LORD HELFORD.

Impossible ! Root crops are extremely exacting.

RUPERT.

Would she look at a lover when the latest patent mowing machine was mowing her hay ?

LORD HELFORD.

She wouldn't—unless he got in the road.

RUPERT.

Would she dream of marriage when her constant day-dream was how to enrich the milk with a strain of Alderney ?

LORD HELFORD.

Out of the question ! That's the worst of an intoxicating pursuit like agriculture for women. It makes hay with all their gentler instincts. Their affections run to seed. Your only chance is to take her in flank.

RUPERT.

But how ?

LORD HELFORD.

Sicken her with the whole business.

RUPERT.

But if a beautiful home and a brilliant position, with all its scope and luxury, doesn't sicken her against

farmyard muck and rotating crops of turnips, I don't see what chance there is for me.

LORD HELFORD.

Oh, go down and hang about—pretend it's fishing. Something unpleasant 's sure to turn up. Well! make the most of it. Pull her out of the hole—win her gratitude.

RUPERT.

(*Springing up.*) I will! And when farm-stock turns to rend her, perhaps she'll fly to me.

(LADY GWENDOLEN *enters. She is about twenty-three, pretty, and beautifully dressed. Her manner is extremely self-reliant; her voice concise. She is pre-eminently a young women who knows what she wants, and means to have it. She shakes hands cordially with* RUPERT.)

GWENDOLEN.

Good-evening. (*Wandering round the room and searching.*) Have you seen the latest Returns of the Board of Agriculture, father?

LORD HELFORD.

No. But if you must have something to help you sow your wild oats, here's *Country Life.* (*Hands it.*)

GWENDOLEN.

(*Throwing it down.*) Pough! I've just been reading *High Arts for Humble Hands.* Think how often those hands—in the past—have idled away their evenings when they might have been beating beautiful bowls out of copper! Think of all the village Giottos one may hope to unearth when one's doing the spade work of a pioneer!

RUPERT.

Soon every cottage will be the seat of one of Nature's noblemen—a new order probably holding no snobbish ideas about deference—no sordid thought of rent.

GWENDOLEN.

Exactly! I'm going to teach the village that rank is nothing—or worse than nothing—without a great ideal.

LORD HELFORD.

My dear Gwen, I see it's high time you got a husband, a good, dependable husband, who'll shut you up.

GWENDOLEN.

Excuse my saying, father, that you're no more in touch with the present age and our generation than if you were King Lear or Queen Elizabeth. Nowadays every one who counts for anything is a Socialist—more or less. And I'm a Socialist down to the ground!

LORD HELFORD.

I've noticed that's where they generally stand—when the grounds they stand on are other peoples'. (*Gets up and speaks as though addressing the House of Lords.*) But let me tell you, Gwen, that a sound Whig peer who has sat in the Upper House for thirty years and held several distinguished Household appointments, is no Queen Elizabeth. Though I have three disobedient and undutiful daughters, don't imagine they've got a poor, doting, old, drivelling King Lear for a father. The insanity of our family is not hereditary—it's a freak of Nature, confined to the generation I do not touch.

(*He goes out.*)

GWENDOLEN.

I think it's so sad when children have to begin to make allowances for a parent's petrifaction. I feel we ought to be patient with poor father, however antediluvian he may be.

RUPERT.

"Other times, other manners," you know. We in our turn may live to be the last hope of the stern, unbend-

ing Tories. In the meantime let me congratulate you, Gwen, on your new appointment.

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, isn't it splendid ? I've worked and worked for a year at College and now I've got my reward. At last I shall be of some use in the world, and life be worth the living.

RUPERT.

(*Very tenderly.*) But won't you—won't you make *one* man happy ? I don't ask more than that.

GWENDOLEN.

You're asking a great deal too much. There's some one whose happiness is far more important than any young man's—and that's myself !

RUPERT.

(*Chilled.*) I'm afraid you're cold, Gwen — cold. Though, if you are, it's only like most of your sex nowadays. I'm not sure that even I understand our generation. Why are its girls so unromantic ?

GWENDOLEN.

Because romance hangs on the worn-out idea of a weaker sex. There is no weaker sex any more, though I daresay there'll soon be a stronger. In the future we mean to play the game ourselves, and beat you all in one innings—hollow !

RUPERT.

(*With humorous horror.*) Not at cricket !—anything —everything—please—but cricket !

GWENDOLEN.

I was speaking metaphorically, of course. Do you really suppose we should care to waste the precious time it would take us to beat an All England Eleven at Lords ?

RUPERT.
(*With exceptional firmness.*) I do not.

GWENDOLEN.
But I haven't time to idle away in chatter. You might help me to hunt for those Returns. A bonny, big, blue book—it's lying somewhere about.
(*They both search round the room, talking as they do so.*)

RUPERT.
I shan't see anything of you if you bury yourself in Cornwall.

GWENDOLEN.
Certainly not—unless you come down too.

RUPERT.
I was thinking of that. I had just planned to run down for some fishing.

GWENDOLEN.
Fish may be shy, but you'd probably see more of them than you would of me. I'm going to Cornwall to work —work !—not to loaf with an idle man. And if you want to be with me, you'll have to work too.

RUPERT.
Work together ! Doesn't it sound enticingly idyllic ? But I really don't see how we can.

GWENDOLEN.
Nor do I—so that settles it.

RUPERT.
(*Finding the book.*) Here is the bonny, big, blue book. The table was groaning with it. (*He comes forward and speaks earnestly in quite a different voice.*) You know how I love you, Gwendolen. This isn't the first time I've confessed it. (*He speaks eagerly—almost hotly*). You've never refused me. You've never accepted me. You've simply played with me. You haven't been fair—you've been cruel.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Almost touched.*) I hope not cruel, Rupert; I like you—at least, I think I like you. (*Recovering herself.*) But, as I've told you before, I couldn't marry a man who has never done an honest day's work in his life. You're your uncle's heir. You accept the position. You strive for nothing. You never "take chairs"—you don't sit on the bench——

RUPERT.

And I've never even stood in the dock—perhaps that would melt you a little.

GWENDOLEN.

Why don't you try to improve your mind? Have you no opinions on fiscal policy?

RUPERT.

Oh, yes, but I must admit they've got a bit mixed lately.

GWENDOLEN.

I daresay your knowledge of Trade itself is limited.

RUPERT.

Limited to the last degree.

GWENDOLEN.

But that need not have prevented your discussing it brilliantly—if you'd had the wits. Many of our leading men harp quite delightfully on the subject and drum statistics into each other, obviously knowing little or nothing about it.

RUPERT.

I never conduct that kind of music.

GWENDOLEN.

No! You only fiddle.

RUPERT.

Besides I prefer to talk to young ladies about something more amusing.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Very seriously.*) Do you know that to many of us abstract Economics is an amusement ?

RUPERT.

I should never have guessed it from the Ladies' Clubs I've lunched at, or their journals I've dipped into.

GWENDOLEN.

You treat us as children to be coaxed and amused, at the very moment that we are revolutionising the basis of all society. We are the coming power. It's we women who will count in the future, when we've got the vote. We shall outnumber you. We shall rule you.

RUPERT.

Happy, happy future ! But, seriously, don't you think this Cult of work is merely your sex's last form of excitement—their latest nerve-thrill ? I'm a bit *blasé* myself, I admit it. I'm as dependent on a new thrill as any one—only mine are generally so ruinously expensive.

GWENDOLEN.

It's not the search for a thrill that makes us eager for work. It's the craving to be efficient, and at least to do some one thing that's effective in life.

RUPERT.

When you talk of work, please don't forget I went out to fight in South Africa.

GWENDOLEN.

Do you call that work ?

RUPERT.

Well, it almost ceases to be play when a frolicsome bullet skips into your leg and out again.

GWENDOLEN.

Then you had the treat of that thrill—the thrill of

a genuine puncture. Besides, there was nothing so very original in going out to South Africa, was there ? Almost every one who could get away did it. If you are truly in search of a new sensation, why not come down and do some real work on my farm ?—" the spade work of a pioneer."

RUPERT.
It sounds repaying.

GWENDOLEN.
The Simple Life.

RUPERT.
The Simple Life—delicious. I might shoot your rabbits, or ride round for you to keep an eye on your crops, and all that sort of thing.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Earnestly.*) That's not what I mean, Rupert. I'm suggesting the exotic nerve-thrill of manual labour.

RUPERT.
Manual labour ?

GWENDOLEN.
Yes—delightful, hard, strenuous, manual labour.

RUPERT.
(*Beginning to grow amused.*) One would think you were proposing to raise me to your new peerage.

GWENDOLEN.
I am. I propose to create you an agricultural labourer !

RUPERT.
(*Bursting out laughing.*) Really, Gwen, you're superb ! But at least I'm glad to see you haven't lost the power of making your jokes more deliciously frantic than ever.

GWENDOLEN.
Never more serious in my life ! You think it over ! Fifteen shillings a week and ten hours a day roughing it

in the bracing, rollicking, health-giving air of the country —that's my offer.

RUPERT.
(*Mockingly.*) To the epicurean it certainly offers all the charm of the most lurid novelty.

GWENDOLEN.
You'd think nothing of the job in Canada. You'd enjoy it! Why not here?

RUPERT.
But nobody does it here.

GWENDOLEN.
They don't—never been thought of. It's new—it's unique! That's its exquisite recommendation. It would make a new man of you.

RUPERT.
I'm not sure I'm prepared for the transformation. I cling to the old man yet.

GWENDOLEN.
It's essential, if you would win my respect. Imagine yourself a cowboy out in the wild Wild West!

RUPERT.
(*Beginning to come round.*) I know that the strenuous life is tremendously *chic* just now. It's the *dernier cri*.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Encouragingly*). And this would be the strenuous life *in excelsis*.

RUPERT.
There's one good thing it would do, it would give one's income a chance of rest and recovery. I know mine needs it badly. It finds ordinary life extremely exhausting.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Enthusiastically.*) While with me you'd be earning something every day. There's a new excitement for you!

RUPERT.

If I were to give this weird folly a trial, just for the fun of the thing and to please you (*takes her hand*), would you hold out a hope, one kind, little hope, Gwen, that some day you might be relenting?

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, but I can't promise anything. I have to think of my new profession, you see. And I don't know yet if a land agent is helped or handicapped by having a husband.

RUPERT.

Then this social leap shall depend on my pass-book. I've got it downstairs in my overcoat. My future hangs on the balance.

(*Enter tumultuously* LADY JANE, LADY ELIZABETH—*they are two extremely modern, determined, and pretty girls*—CAPTAIN FANSHAWE *and* DOLLY, *all talking together. The* FOOTMAN *follows with a cloth, which he spreads over a small table, and returns with a tray of light refreshment — claret, whisky, and soda, etc. They all talk fast with a certain breathless exuberance.*)

DOLLY.

Here we are—" bringing back the ashes."

LADY ELIZABETH.

It was a success! Wasn't it, Captain Fanshawe?

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

Immense!—quite useful!

DOLLY.

Nothing less than a *succes fou*, as the French say.

RUPERT.
(*To* LADY JANE.) I congratulate you on having conquered London.

LADY JANE.
I'm still a little nervous about the morning papers.

RUPERT.
Oh, never mind them! They mayn't say much. They lack all sense of proportion.

GWENDOLEN.
Probably we shall detect a conspiracy of silence.

LADY ELIZABETH.
But the ladies' papers!

RUPERT.
Ah, the ladies' papers! The light, bright, chatty pictorial papers!

LADY JANE.
Dear things! Three of them have already asked for my photo. And *Choice Chat* interviews me to-morrow.

RUPERT.
Then fame leaves little for posterity to discover.
(*He goes up and speaks to the* FOOTMAN.)

GWENDOLEN.
(*Earnestly.*) We must shelter poor father from all this as much as we can. It only distresses him. He has grown too old to grasp the trend of our social evolution. Only this morning he got quite grumpy because I told him I was a suffragist.

LADY JANE.
(*Conclusively.*) Poor father's breaking up.

LADY ELIZABETH.
(*To* CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.) I'm afraid so! He won't

allow supper after the theatre, but he can't forbid us our tray of bread and water. So let's fall to.

(*She begins to hand the sandwiches and* DOLLY *the drinks.*)

LADY JANE.

Why didn't you come to the play, Rupert ?

RUPERT.

I've been awfully busy. Gwen and I have been putting our heads together over a blue book.

DOLLY.

Hope she didn't give it a nasty crack, then. Hers, you see, is about cracked already.

(LORD HELFORD *enters. There is a sudden silence, but they continue to hand, and the rest of the party to eat.*)

LORD HELFORD.

(*Begins his nightly admonition. By now it has lost its old commanding ring.*) Back at last ! It's extremely late. High time for bed, girls. Who says " bed " ?

LADY JANE.

(*Decisively.*) Nobody says " bed." What we say is it's high time to get on to " bridge."

(*Assisted by* RUPERT, *she brings out table, lays out the cards, etc.*)

LORD HELFORD.

(*Looking at his watch—a mere form.*) Do you know it's nearly midnight ?

LADY JANE.

All the better. You can't object to our playing a game to-morrow morning.

LORD HELFORD.

Come, come, girls—burning the candle at both ends as usual.

LADY JANE.
There are no candle ends left to burn in modern life, father. It's one dazzling flare of electricity.

DOLLY.
Don't you want to hear about Jane and her triumph, father ?

LORD HELFORD.
(*With fierce parental decision.*) I do not ! The subject is so reprehensible that for the future I should prefer it to be *taboo* in my presence.

EVERY ONE.
(*For the moment silenced.*) Oh !

LORD HELFORD.
Mrs Grundy, girls—think of Mrs Grundy.

LADY JANE.
Mrs Grundy is dead and buried.

LORD HELFORD.
I daresay she is, but you needn't cake-walk on her grave. My daughters seem to forget they were born in the purple.

GWENDOLEN.
We can't ! That horrible patch of purple glares at us day and night.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Really roused at last.*) Silence, Gwen, silence !
(*An awkward pause.*)

LADY ELIZABETH.
(*With the courage of a daughter in revolt.*) If we mayn't talk, we've all the more time for munching. (*Pops half a sandwich into her mouth defiantly.*)
(*Enter* MRS MAJORIBANKS *briskly. She kisses* LADY JANE *joyously.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

So you're back already, darling! (*Cheerfully.*) We've had such a painful evening, wishing to hide our distress—for your sake—so as not to damp your future. I've been trying to help your poor angelic father to bear this last adversity. It's all so dreadfully sad. I thought you looked lovely.

(*The* FOOTMAN *brings in* RUPERT'S *overcoat and hands it to him.*)

LADY JANE.

How did you know?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Oh, my dear! I wouldn't have countenanced the play for a moment. But I was somewhere behind in front just—where I could wink at it.

LORD HELFORD.

I'm sorry you winked at it, Sophia. I think it would have been more dignified—more considerate—if you'd shut your eyes to it, and remained here with me to share the dregs of my cup of humiliation.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

You forget, Henry, I did have a gulp before I slipped round to—sip at Jane's. (*To* JANE.) Why didn't you get a better picture put in the *Daily Mirror*? It's a perfect scandal!

LORD HELFORD.

I should think so. I forbid its mention in my house—now and in future.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

I mean it's so badly reproduced.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

(*To* LORD HELFORD.) I must be off. Good-night.

(*He shakes hands all round and goes.* RUPERT *and*

DOLLY *have come forward,* RUPERT *examining his pass-book.*)

RUPERT.

(*To* DOLLY.) I seem, after all, to have a good balance. I was afraid it had run down to next to nothing.

DOLLY.

(*Looking over his shoulder.*) A good balance on the wrong side, old man! I know the place well. (*Points with his finger.*) *That's* what you've overdrawn.

(*He goes back to table.*)

RUPERT.

(*Shutting book sharply.*) Then that decides me! And now to make a clean breast of it.

DOLLY.

Have a whisky-and-soda, aunt?

(*He pours out the soda.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Never—never! Just a drop of soda to damp my spirits —for I'm all on your father's side, you know.

(*By now* GWENDOLEN, LADY JANE, *and* LADY ELIZABETH *are seated at the card table.*)

RUPERT.

Lady Jane is not the only person you have to congratulate to-night.

LORD HELFORD.

(*In horror.*) Ah, not another irreparable blow about to descend on our doomed and degenerate house!

(MRS MAJORIBANKS *takes his hand to help him to bear the news.*)

RUPERT.

No. It's I who claim your congratulations. You know I've never wasted a moment. I've thrown myself

into everything that a man should undertake. I've been a slave to duty, and now I'm going to chuck it all to take up a new career at Gwen's dictation.

EVERY ONE.
What is it ?

RUPERT.
It's almost morbidly eccentric—guess !

LORD HELFORD.
If it's politics, be a free food protectionist. It doesn't commit you to anything !

RUPERT.
No, it isn't politics. It's something almost unspeakable ; I'm about to fly in the face of society.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Oh, I don't like that ! It sounds so flighty.

DOLLY.
Have a bi-plane, old chap—not a mono.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
A dear worker in the Mission Field of China ?

RUPERT.
No !

LADY ELIZABETH.
(*Sternly.*) An intelligent citizen who's going to be of some use in the world ?

RUPERT.
Oh, dear no ! I'm playing an incredible comedy.

ALL.
Then we give it up.

RUPERT.
(*Taking the centre of the stage, heroically and yet with a*

humorous touch of mock heroics.) I have accepted Gwendolen's generous offer of a post of manual labour on her farm. And in me you behold a future Agricultural Labourer!

(*The men burst out laughing, but the girls remain quite grave.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT II

SCENE: *The cosy living-room of an old farmhouse in Cornwall. On the left is a narrow, steep staircase and door to scullery. On the right a large open fireplace and dresser covered with a dinner set. At the back is a door and a long, low window (with window seat) opening on to a luxuriant Cornish garden. The ceiling is timbered, the floor of stone is sanded, but rugs lie in the window. The tables and chairs are old farmhouse furniture, yet there are transitory signs of culture. There is a small cottage piano, and books stand on the dresser's bottom shelf. The whole place looks delightfully homely and attractive. It is about eight in the morning.*

GWENDOLEN *is discovered seated at the table, immersed in a volume of "The Encyclopædia Britannica."*

GWENDOLEN.

(*Reading slowly.*) "Plan and Results of Estimations of the compensation value of Unexhausted Manure, starting from the original manure value; that is the value deducting the constituents of increase in fattening Live Weight only." (*She looks up.*) It reminds me of Browning's poetry. Each time you read it over you get fresh inspiration about it's meaning.—don't you? (*Begins again.*) "Plans and Results of Estimations"—(CONNIE *enters briskly from the back carrying a tray covered with pats of butter which she transfers to a large basket as she talks*)—"of the compensation value of——"

CONNIE.

Are you deep in manure?

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, over head and ears! It's most engaging! The scientific study of chemical manures is far too enthralling a subject for any woman to take up as a pastime merely. It carries one away so, one quite forgets how time is going. Give me the Dairy Volume, Volume D. (*She closes the one she is reading and* CONNIE *brings her another.*) Thanks! I hope you got on better with your milking this morning, Connie.

CONNIE.

Yes, but the milk is still somewhat coy in coming.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Sententiously.*) Strange! that it should be so much easier to manage a farm than to milk a cow!

CONNIE.

I had to get Rupert to help me at last.

GWENDOLEN.

There's too much of Rupert about nowadays. We shall have to be very careful not to spoil him. (*Goes to the scullery door and calls.*) Mary Ellen!

MARY ELLEN'S VOICE.

What is ut, then? I can't come to 'ee. I be a deal too busy, my dear!

GWENDOLEN.

(*With dignity.*) Hardly so busy as your mistress, I think. Where is Mr Warriner?

MARY ELLEN'S VOICE.

Lor', my dear, he be up to the pump a-washing 'isself as usual, I b'lieve.

GWENDOLEN.

I wish to see him as soon as he's perfectly clean. (*She returns to her book and reads.*) Listen to this! "The

Laplander obtains his supplies of milk from the reindeer, the roving Tartar from his mares, and the Bedouin of the desert from his camels. In the temperate regions of the Earth, many pastoral tribes subsist mainly upon the milk of sheep. In some rocky regions the goat is invaluable as a milk-yielder, and the buffalo is equally so amid the swamps and jungles of tropical climates. A few milch asses and goats are here and there kept for the benefit of infants and invalids, but with these exceptions the cow is the only animal now used for dairy purposes in this country." Isn't it beautifully put—so lyrical ?

CONNIE.

(*Excitedly.*) I could have told you all that in one word —cows. Did you know the Territorials were out for a field day ?

GWENDOLEN.

No. Why ?

CONNIE.

There's always a chance of their skirmishing into sight. They're so intelligently extended nowadays.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Coldly.*) What has their formation to do with us ?

CONNIE.

(*All her latent womanhood roused to purpose.*) It covers more ground. We may possibly catch an attack.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Shocked.*) Really, Connie, I'm ashamed of you. The idea of your wanting to stare at a lot of "Terriers" pretending to fight a battle by swarming on all fours all over the country ! It's so like dull men who've nothing better to do. You'd never catch women at anything so unpractical. Now I suppose our men will make it an excuse to idle their whole precious morning away.

CONNIE.
Surely not, if you speak to them as concisely as you've spoken to me.

GWENDOLEN.
I shall—I certainly shall. But somehow they don't attend to my wishes as I should expect. Warriner at least is respectful, though he's shockingly slack. But as for the others—they've no notion of subordination. All sense of duty seems totally lacking.

CONNIE.
(*With a touch of malice.*) Have you heard of the deputation ?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Startled.*) What deputation ?

CONNIE.
I believe our men are going to present a verbal petition —or a formal complaint—or something—this morning.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Looking up.*) Whatever about ?

CONNIE.
It's hinted that the contemptible creatures object to us—or at least don't appreciate you.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Springing up and slamming her book.*) I—I'm their Joan of Arc ! How can they fail to appreciate their new privileges when they're lucky enough to have sympathetic womanly superintendence, instead of being under the heel of a coarse, hard man ?

CONNIE.
I don't know ! Perhaps they find it easier to swear when under the heel of a man. But here they come ; you can ask them yourself.

(RUPERT, TRESISE, *and* RETALLACK *knock and enter.* RUPERT *is dressed more or less as a labourer and wears a beard. During the following scene he speaks half-solemnly, half-bantering. He takes the situation seriously, but occasionally his sense of humour overmasters his sense of decorum.*)

RUPERT.
Good-morning, Lady Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN.
(*To* CONNIE.) You'd better get ready to drive to market. (CONNIE *goes upstairs.*) (*To the men—sharply.*) 'Morning, my men, good-morning. Well, what is it ?

RUPERT.
(*Ceremoniously.*) I have been asked by my fellow labourers to be the spokesman of this deputation. I believe they chose me because they thought I'd got your ear.

GWENDOLEN.
(*With all the dignity of a high-class employer.*) I'm afraid my good friends are very ignorant people. I want them to observe that a woman keeps her ears to herself.

RUPERT.
(*Apologetically.*) But I must hasten to add that I entirely dissociate myself from the sentiments I'm about to voice. Regard me, please, as merely a passive mouthpiece.

GWENDOLEN.
Don't be afraid of my doing anything else.

TRESISE.
(*Speaking slowly in the broadest Cornish.*) Seeming to we—'tain't a lady's work to be trying to farm and sich-like.

RETALLACK.

No, nor a woman's neither! Women know naught about farming. They ain't got the wits.

TRESISE.

Let 'em stick to the dairy, then. There's a brave lot of work to be done there—if they knowed how to do ut proper—which 'ee don't—they're tellin'.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Her upper lip stiff, her blue blood boiling.*) We must make allowances, but I hope Warriner will tell you that you should be courteous to every one—to women as well as men. There ought to be no distinction between the sexes.

TRESISE.

(*As though propounding the discovery of a profound truth.*) Maybe there oughtn't to be, but there is! That's what we want 'ee to think of then—if 'ee don't know ut.

RETALLACK.

We be quizzed at down to The Sly Golden Fox of a night. We be sniggered at proper! They do call this 'ere place the Woman's Ward.

TRESISE.

I've heard ut called worse nor that, I b'lieve—I've 'eard ut called the 'En Coop.

RUPERT.

(*Tactfully intercepting.*) I'm afraid my companions are a little precipitate. (*Aside to the men.*) Shut up, can't you! (*To* GWENDOLEN.) They entirely appreciate your aptitude for the position, and your great condescension in coming among them, but——

TRESISE.

'E 'aven't said what we're come 'ere for to say.

RETALLACK.
Naw, 'e 'aven't. Bring it out, man! 'Twill be an encouragement to the missus.

RUPERT.
Certainly not. I told you I decline to say a word on the subject.

GWENDOLEN.
(*With the air of a Queen.*) I insist on hearing what my good friends are so anxious that you should tell me.

RUPERT.
(*Resigned.*) Oh, very well!—only don't blame me. They venture to think it would be a boon to all of us if you were self-sacrificing enough to stoop to the holy state of matrimony.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Hardly believing her ears.*) Matrimony!

TRESISE.
Ees, I b'lieve—why don't 'ee take a mate, then?

RETALLACK.
I don't think 'ee'll have to go far to look for un, neither.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Dismissing the rebels.*) That is a case of the grossest impertinence! I'm ashamed of you, Warriner—ring-leading these poor creatures here to insult me. And if I hear another word, I'll dismiss you all on the spot.

RUPERT.
(*Aside to* GWENDOLEN *quickly.*) It's the greatest mistake to threaten that, Gwendolen. You forget the hay's about to be cut and all the farms round are short of labour.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Aside.*) Mind your own business. Why are you heading this insubordination ?

RUPERT.
(*Aside.*) The fact is, they were coming up anyhow. I was afraid they'd be rude, and so joined them, hoping to be of some use to you, and perhaps help to smooth things over.

GWENDOLEN.
(*With sudden appeal.*) What can I say to them ? Oh, please, Rupert, say something quick for me—something to smooth them over, and kick them out.

RUPERT.
(*To the men.*) Lady Gwendolen says she appreciates our kindness in laying our views before her. They shall be duly considered. And in the meantime she would be glad if we returned to hand-hoe the corn.

TRESISE.
(*Suspicious.*) Did she say all that there, then ?

RUPERT.
Virtually—approximately.

TRESISE.
Seeming to me 'ee do talk too handsome and gabby-like. Us can't understand them long words. We can't trust 'ee—naw, we can't.

RETALLACK.
(*Who has moved to the window.*) Soldiers !

TRESISE.
(*Turning.*) The soldiers be coming along our lane.

GWENDOLEN.

I knew they'd be slinking round here. Now everything's upside down for the rest of the day.

(*The scullery door suddenly opens;* MARY ELLEN, *a characteristic Cornish servant of about fifty, rushes in and up to the window.*)

MARY ELLEN.

Lor,' the pretty dears! Look at 'em, there they be, then. Gracious! they've left their red coats at 'ome and come out in dirt colour.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Turns on the latest rebel.*) I'm surprised at you, Mary Ellen. You're very giddy for your age, I'm afraid. I see there's a lot yet I shall have to teach you. It's for our sex to set an example by taking no notice of loafers who join the army in order to shirk hard work and flaunt about in uniform.

MARY ELLEN.

(*With point.*) Perhaps 'ee've never been courted by a soldier. I 'ave, more than once, then.

GWENDOLEN.

(*To* RUPERT.) What are the names of these men?

RUPERT.

(*To* GWENDOLEN.) George Tresise and Henry Retallack.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Sharply*) Tresise and Retallack (*they turn unwillingly*), and you too, Warriner—listen to me, please! I won't have my men wasting their time to idle with soldiers. Do you understand?

RUPERT.

(*Solemnly.*) Yes, Lady Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN.
Mind I don't find you gaping about at the men like a parcel of servant girls.

RUPERT.
No, Lady Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN.
If you see the officer in command, give him my compliments and tell him this land is private, and I shall be glad if he'll carry his battle off elsewhere.

RUPERT.
Yes, Lady Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN.
And if you catch any of the men trespassing on the farm, take their names at once and warn them off the premises.

RUPERT.
Certainly, Lady Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN.
Now put the horse in the cart for Miss Wantage to drive her cheeses to market. (*To all.*) You can go. (RUPERT, TRESISE, *and* RETALLACK *go out at back.*) (*Sternly.*) Don't let me have to speak to *you* again, Mary Ellen.

MARY ELLEN.
(*Cheerfully.*) Lor', my dear, don't 'ee fret, then! I knew my duty afore 'ee were born, or thought of. But the men be quite right, I b'lieve. It bean't no use for a woman to try to farm without a husband.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Letting herself go at last.*) That's the vile, horrible,

obsolete view of women we're putting a stop to. I hope I shall never be as weak as our mothers.

MARY ELLEN.

(*Half-consciously uttering a startling truth.*) If 'ee talk like that, where will yer daughters come from ? Well, I do say, and the men do say ut too, that the sooner 'ee make ut up with young Warriner the better for all of us.

GWENDOLEN.

I don't understand you.

MARY ELLEN.

Bean't 'ee be keeping company with 'im, then ?

GWENDOLEN.

(*Still furious.*) How dare you say such a thing !

MARY ELLEN.

(*With a woman's instinct.*) Then what's a gent like 'e working down here for, if it's not for 'is sweetheart ? It can't be the wages that keep 'im sweating about the fields all day.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Temper gradually yielding to her aristocratic self-control.*) Warriner is a deserving young man I happened to know in town. I suggested that he should do something useful, and was glad to be able to offer him the chance. He's come down here to set an example to the London Clubs. He wished to live the Simple Life.

MARY ELLEN.

Simple foolery, bless yer 'eart ! 'Ee'll have to take 'im sooner or later. I can see 'e's sweet on 'ee by the sheep's eyes 'e casts.

GWENDOLEN.

Be good enough to attend my Home Arts Class this evening, Mary Ellen. I hope wood-carving and poker

work will lift your soul above the notion of sheep's eyes. (MARY ELLEN *goes into scullery.* CONNIE *comes downstairs with her hat on.* GWENDOLEN *gets a hammer and nails and hangs up several autotypes after Burne Jones and Botticelli while she talks.*) Now's a good time for hanging pictures. It's nice to be able to bring a high ideal into these people's lives. I'm sure they need it. I only wish we had some of Whistler's lithographs to raise their tone.

CONNIE.
They'd prefer the *Daily Mirror.*

GWENDOLEN.
I know. Isn't it heart-breaking ? I suppose we shall have Mrs Tolson smelling round and poking her nose into everything, as usual.

CONNIE.
(*Deprecating.*) After all, Gwen—we mustn't forget she's a woman.

GWENDOLEN.
Woman ! I don't call her a woman. She's a female Troglodyte.

CONNIE.
(*With curiosity.*) You repulsed the deputation. What did Warriner say ?

GWENDOLEN.
Of course, he made the best of it, and said he'd only come up to smooth things over. With a man's conceit, he fancies himself a born diplomatist, and I really believe he tried to do his best. But I'm still very vexed with him. He ought to have squashed the whole thing in the egg. I won't degrade myself by repeating what he

publicly said. It was the kind of disgusting remark that stamps a man for ever. I can see I've let him get himself into a false position here. These low-minded people don't understand us and fancy we're going—to make a match of it.

CONNIE.

(*Quite innocently—she is a very human girl.*) But aren't you ?

GWENDOLEN.

(*Not condescending even to show her temper.*) Connie ! There are some subjects that it's bad taste for even self-supporting women to joke on. I see I've given you all a false impression. It only proves how I've over-indulged him ; I shall have to behave very differently in future, and put him once for all in his proper place. (*Moving.*) I'm going to work off my indignation by slapping butter.

(GWENDOLEN *goes off left.* CONNIE *goes to the garden door and calls* "WARRINER" *twice. He enters.*)

CONNIE.

Are the soldiers still in the lane ?

RUPERT.

A whole company cowering in the ditch.

CONNIE.

(*Of course delighted.*) How exciting !

RUPERT.

(*At the window.*) Here's one of the officers coming up.

CONNIE.

The horse is harnessed ? (*He nods.*) Then I don't think you need put in for ten minutes. As Gwen's gone off to slap the butter it's my place to entertain him.

(*There is a knock.* RUPERT *opens the door and* CAPTAIN FANSHAWE *enters.*)

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
May I ask you to be so kind as to give me a glass of milk ?

CONNIE.
Certainly ! Would you fetch a jug of milk, Warriner, please ? (RUPERT *goes out of the garden door.*)

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
Our company's here in reserve. And we're now waiting for orders. Would you excuse my writing a message ?

CONNIE.
Of course ! It's all part of the battle, isn't it ?

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
(*Taking out note-book.*) Messages are a most essential part of a modern battle. The more you send, the more efficient your seniors think you. It doesn't the least matter what they're about. (*Writes.*) What's the name of this farm ?

CONNIE.
Keggillick.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
Hour ? (*Looks at his watch.*) Eight-thirty. (*Writing as he talks.*) You haven't concealed any enemy here ?

CONNIE.
No, we haven't seen anything of them, worse luck !

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
Would you like to ?

CONNIE.
Of course ! The more the merrier ! (*With much meaning.*) If the glorious uncertainty of war brought

any officers here, I think we could manage something stronger than milk.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

You're a brick. But if one's on duty and wants to do that sort of thing in a Service note, it needs a lot of diplomacy to force the suggestion undetected. Let me see. (*Writes.*) "Large inhabited farm—good place for rallying after battle." (*Signs.*) Rather a neat piece of strategy, that! I think it'll bring the C.O. here for his pow-wow. (RUPERT *returns with the jug.* CONNIE *gets glasses.* CAPTAIN FANSHAWE *gives* RUPERT *a shilling.*) Thank you, my man. Tell the Colour-Sergeant I want him.

(RUPERT *looks at the shilling with astonishment, then half-smiling pockets it.*)

RUPERT.

My mistress asked me to give you her compliments, sir, and hopes that you'll kindly carry your battle on elsewhere.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

(*To* CONNIE.) There, you see, we're not wanted.

CONNIE.

(*Hastily.*) He doesn't know what he's talking about. (*To* RUPERT.) I wish you'd be quiet, Warriner, and mind your own business. I've just arranged everything with this gentleman. (*To* CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.) What do you say to some bread and cream?

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

Thanks! Sounds delicious!

CONNIE.

Warriner, would you mind bringing some cream?

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

May my subaltern have a glass of milk?

CONNIE.
Yes, do ask him in. (*She begins to cut the bread.*)

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
(*At window.*) Sergeant Brown, tell Lieutenant Dennis I want to speak to him. And send this note by a cyclist. (*Hands note and then in a shocked voice continues.*) Gracious! what are those men straggling there for when they ought to be thinking of work? I wish our men would learn to take cover—and keep it. (*Enter* DOLLY.) Come and have a drink, Dolly—a long drink of milk.

DOLLY.
Good. I'm a bit fed up with that ditch. I've been killing time by getting my servant to teach me a puzzle with matches. (RUPERT *returns with the cream which* CONNIE *proceeds to spread as they talk.*) Why, good God, it's you, Rupert! (*Almost embracing him.*) You don't mean to say this is old Gwen's farm?

RUPERT.
Yes, here we are. Mistress and man! Don't you think I'm made up for the part rather cleverly?

DOLLY.
(*Head on one side.*) The usual amateur's failing—a bit overdone! I heard old Gwen was slogging about here, but I hadn't spotted her pitch. Do you know Captain Fanshawe? Mr Warriner—Captain Fanshawe. (*They bow.*)

RUPERT.
(*Relapsing into his ordinary manner.*) I think we met in Berkeley Square. May I introduce you to Miss Wantage? (*They bow. To* DOLLY.) Miss Wantage—like Gwendolen—is what the papers quaintly call "a daughter of Ceres."

DOLLY.
(*To* CONNIE.) A *what*?

CONNIE.

(*Neatly.*) I'm the cheese girl.

RUPERT.

I've got something better than milk hidden in the bottom cupboard. (*Brings out whisky-and-soda.*) We may venture to sample it as the missus is out. (*Goes to scullery door and calls*) Tumblers, please. The enemy have taken the farm, Mary Ellen, and will sack the place if we don't keep their throats employed.

(MARY ELLEN *dashes in, carrying four tumblers.*)

MARY ELLEN.

Let 'em sack the place, then! But don't 'ee let 'em bring in any more mud on their boots—I won't 'ave it. I ain't going to clean up the dirt after men or officers, either—I tell 'ee. Let 'em put that in their sacks and welcome.

(*She goes out.* RUPERT *is mixing and handing drinks.* CONNIE *hands bread and cream.*)

DOLLY.

(*Sitting boyishly on the dresser and trying to explain the situation while swinging his legs.*) Warriner's down here doing a bit of clodhopping. My sister's a regular terror! It's one of her frantic crazes that men should do something useful. Useful—such rot!

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

(*Trying to say something polite.*) Ah! rather a mucky profession, isn't it?

RUPERT.

(*Playing up manfully to the humour of the situation.*) Yes. But one cleans oneself up before supper.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

(*Picking his words.*) A healthy life, I daresay—invigorating!

RUPERT.
Wonderfully invigorating to a failing income.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.
You must excuse the tip.

RUPERT.
Rather! It's the first I've been socked since I left Eton.

(*By now the three men have their drinks, and the four are eating bread and cream.* DOLLY *is seated on the dresser,* RUPERT *on the table, the other two on chairs.*)

DOLLY.
(*Lapped in content.*) Now, this is useful, distinctly useful. It's something like a field day! (*Cheerfully.*) I suppose Gwen's making an awful mess of her farming?

RUPERT.
Not at all! She's intensely serious and plodding. Swotting up her work out of books every evening—out and about the farm next morning, applying it. But I'm afraid she's bitten off more than she can swallow. The landlord's wife is a perfect gorgon! I detect the head bailiff is getting jealous; and as for the men—they're in a simmering mutiny. I have to keep cooling them down with beer to prevent their boiling over. Sex, you know, is a terrible handicap!

DOLLY.
(*Gravely.*) Rather! It's all very well for women to play at being things. But when the game becomes serious, they have to fall back on us. (*With the gravity of a discoverer.*) I always tell 'em they mustn't forget there isn't one sex at present—but two!

CONNIE.
(*Pointedly.*) Fancy that now! Really!

DOLLY.

(*Expansively.*) My sisters are such pig-headed owls about what they call their careers that they turn up their noses at good advice. So I just humour their follies. That's the only way to treat girls with that kind of side on. Sooner or later they have to learn their lesson—find their level. (*Sententiously.*) *Girl and Supergirl!* My sisters are all supergirls—worse luck!

CONNIE.

(*With sharpening point.*) I'm glad you feel it.

DOLLY.

(*To* RUPERT.) And how's your job going? Got a neat lofting swing with the pitchfork yet, or is it hedging and ditching?

RUPERT.

I believe I'm not considered competent for such a delicate task at present.

DOLLY.

Oh, you old slacker!

RUPERT.

The life's healthy enough. But of course I'm only down here for Gwendolen's sake—though she doesn't seem to see it.

DOLLY.

Ah, you've put your money on the wrong horse, my boy. Did you know your Uncle Amberfield's with us? He's our C.O. now.

RUPERT.

Then I suppose I shall have to disguise myself as a gentleman and look him up.

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

Time to be seeing after my men. (*Goes to window and*

calls.) Colour-Sergeant Brown, what the dickens are the men doing there round that pump ? Drinking water ! Keep them lying down in the ditch, can't you ? Nowadays men must learn to use their intelligence !

(*Every one rises.*)

DOLLY.

(*To* CONNIE.) I shall often be sloping over to cheer old Gwen. You must put me up to the cheese-making game.

CONNIE.

That's a mystery I wouldn't presume to pry into, if I were you. The initiation is extremely fatiguing.

DOLLY.

(*Sweetly.*) Oh, I don't ask to do anything—only just to sit by watching you—so as to pick up some wrinkles.

CONNIE.

If you come you'll have to make yourself useful. We're in want of a handy boy to wash out the cheese tubs.

DOLLY.

(*Untouched by any acidity.*) You don't catch a second Rupert to fag, not likely ! I'm too wide awake for that.

(*A cyclist comes up to the door, knocks, and brings in a note.*)

CAPTAIN FANSHAWE.

(*Reading.*) We must be off. (*Calls at window*) Colour-Sergeant Brown, we're ordered to advance cautiously to reinforce B Company. Make the men creep along the ditch on their stomachs till further notice. (*To* CONNIE.) Good-bye, Miss Wantage.

(CAPTAIN FANSHAWE *and* DOLLY *go out through the garden door.*)

CONNIE.

(*Somewhat flustered.*) Do you mind bundling this litter

away? I must simply fly and send Tresise in with the cheese. For if they're going to have what they call their pow-wow here, I ought to stay to help Gwen to bear it.

(*She goes out through the garden.* RUPERT *proceeds to clear away.* GWENDOLEN *enters from the scullery.*)

GWENDOLEN.

Has any one been to the house? I hear two of the officers were seen lurking about the premises.

(*She gets an account book and begins casting it up.*)

RUPERT.

Yes, they came for a glass of milk. Fancy, one of them was Dolly!

GWENDOLEN.

Idling with his "Terriers" now! I quite forgot he was out. I suppose we shall have him wasting his time here, trying to flirt with Connie. (*Casting.*) Fourpence-halfpenny and twopence-threefarthings is sixpence farthing; and threepence is ninepence-farthing; and three farthings is——

RUPERT.

(*More seriously.*) May I speak to you, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, but I want to speak to you first. Bother! now I shall have to add it all over again. You might have waited till I got to the top of the column. If you'd only been firm this morning, and shown some tact, you could have prevented those misguided bumpkins from coming here to insult me.

RUPERT.

How could I have prevented it?

GWENDOLEN.

By using the influence with which God has endowed our class.

RUPERT.

You have to deal gingerly with Nature's noblemen, you know. Their lordships don't brook any treatment that isn't extremely tactful.

GWENDOLEN.

I wish, instead of turning my views into ridicule, you'd try to be practical for once. Now we'll say no more about it. But mind, never let such a thing occur again. (*She begins to cast-up again.*) Seventeen—twenty-one —twenty-five——

RUPERT.

Have you got to the top of the column ?

GWENDOLEN.

Twenty-nine—thirty-six—thirty-seven—— Yes.

RUPERT.

(*Suddenly.*) I want to ask you a favour. I want leave of absence.

GWENDOLEN.

Do you mean a holiday ? Certainly not ! I wonder you've got the face to suggest such a thing in the hay season. (*She goes on casting-up* sotto voce.)

RUPERT.

If I can't get leave, I'm afraid I shall have to resign my appointment here. The fact is, next month I'm ordered out with my Yeomanry for the training.

GWENDOLEN.

Remember — one hundred and seventeen, please.

(*Putting down pencil.*) You never told me when I engaged you that you were entangled with Yeomanry. You're a trooper, I hope.

RUPERT.
No, Captain.

GWENDOLEN.
I'm sorry for that! I'm so sorry when a respectable and industrious agricultural labourer becomes a Yeomanry captain. It's so demoralising—and it sets such a bad example. What did I say?

RUPERT.
One hundred and seventeen.

GWENDOLEN.
One hundred and seventeen.

RUPERT.
(*Playfully.*) But aren't you sorry when a brilliant and dashing Yeomanry captain becomes an agricultural labourer?

GWENDOLEN.
(*In deadly earnest.*) Not at all! I only wish more of 'em did it. But if I let you go, I do hope you'll keep steady, Rupert, and not get into lazy ways—and be very careful of the company you keep. Don't be led astray by idle companions. I should be sorry if they unfitted you for your duties here. (*She takes up book again.*)

RUPERT.
I'll endeavour to set an example to the subs. It's so seldom they have the privilege of a comrade taken red-handed from the soil.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Throwing down pencil impatiently.*) Nuisance! I've

added it up three times, and each time it's different. One never can do any work, I find, with a man about.

RUPERT.
Let's do it together.
(*He stands behind her and adds up over her shoulder. They both cast-up together* sotto voce.)

GWENDOLEN.
Forty-nine pence.

RUPERT.
No, forty-eight—put down naught and carry four.
(*They continue.*)

GWENDOLEN.
Seventy shillings.

RUPERT.
One hundred and seventy shillings.

GWENDOLEN.
Carry eight. That makes fifteen pounds ten. (*She writes it at bottom.*) Now you might add it up with the other totals.

RUPERT.
(*Takes book and does so, holding it in his hand. Then with a change of voice.*) And now, Gwendolen, this is what I want to say : do you know why I'm down here ?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Coldly.*) To do a fair day's work for a fair day's wage, for once in your life.

RUPERT.
(*With a lover's ardour.*) Not that alone ! For the last two months I've been working for you ; making a fool of myself in the eyes of the world—for you. It can't go on for ever. Are you still unrelenting ?

GWENDOLEN.
How do you mean ?

RUPERT.
I came because I hoped it might please you.
(*The "cease fire" sounds in the far distance.*)

GWENDOLEN.
Did you hope to put me under an obligation ?

RUPERT.
I don't say that.

GWENDOLEN.
It is better we had a frank explanation. Our relationship here seems quite misconstrued. You've presumed on our friendship.

RUPERT.
(*Almost passionately.*) I came down with the hope that if I toiled in your fields and stables—did my best as you know I've done—I should have my reward.

GWENDOLEN.
You were entirely mistaken. Every one seems mistaken. It only shows me that out of misguided kindness I've put you on quite a false footing here. I'm sorry ! I apologise ! It's altogether a misunderstanding.

RUPERT.
(*Hotly.*) It is. I consider I've been played with—treated shabbily—decoyed to your farm under false pretences.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Still more coldly.*) You're getting rude.

RUPERT.
Indignant, if you like—I hope not rude.

GWENDOLEN.

Rude. (*Holds out her hand for the book.*) And now what does it come to ?

RUPERT.

(*Letting out the bitterness of his heart.*) It comes to this —that, in spite of all your emancipation and scorn of feminine weaknesses, you're the merest woman—a coquette at heart !

GWENDOLEN.

(*Taking book and reading.*) It comes to exactly thirty-four pounds, fifteen shillings, and fourpence-halfpenny.

(RUPERT *goes out hastily through the scullery.* DOLLY *enters joyously from the garden.*)

DOLLY.

Hullo, Gwen ! Here you are. (*Kisses her.*) Farming away like a house on fire.

GWENDOLEN.

Yes ; we've no time to waste with soldiers.

DOLLY.

(*Irrepressible.*) I should think Rupert's a bit sick of the job—what ?

GWENDOLEN.

I don't know. I'm very displeased with him to-day. He's getting uppish and out-of-hand. Every one's gossiping about us and he eggs them on. He's just dared to be sentimental and throw all my kindnesses in my teeth. I'm going to punish him.

DOLLY.

How—are you going to rag him?

GWENDOLEN.

I shall see. (*Officers' call sound just outside.*) Gracious !

What's your bugle blowing like that in our yard for? I never heard such cheek in my life.

DOLLY.
It's not cheek—it's the officers' call. The C.O. is going to have his pow-wow somewhere here, so I had to ask him and one or two of the others in for a drink.

GWENDOLEN.
We've only got milk, of course.

DOLLY.
(*With a wink.*) Oh, old Rupert'll see to the milk all right.

GWENDOLEN.
Then ask them in. How's every one at home?

DOLLY.
The other night dad sat down on his hat in the House of Lords and has been in the grumps ever since. Elizabeth's had a lot of smart women in for gowns. But they treat her like a tailor, you know—money no consequence. So now she's looking out for some rich middle-class dissenters who pay their bills religiously.

GWENDOLEN.
I see by Jane's advertisement she's resting. How has she knocked herself up?

DOLLY.
She hasn't. It was the Mediæval show knocked up. That advertisement is the bitter cry of outcast Jane for a new engagement. (*Enter* CONNIE.)

GWENDOLEN.
Connie!

CONNIE.

I sent Tresise in with the cheeses. (*As innocently as a child.*) I thought you might want me to help entertain the officers.

DOLLY.

Quite right—she does, she does.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Grimly.*) I understand now why they say this Jingo spirit is the ruin of English agriculture. (*Going up-stairs.*) I'll be down in a minute.

(*She goes out.* RUPERT *comes in from scullery and goes to window.*)

RUPERT.

Here they come! My uncle, as usual, looking rather in awe of his adjutant.

(*Enter* COLONEL AMBERFIELD, *two umpires with white scarves round their left arms, and* CAPTAIN FANSHAWE. COLONEL AMBERFIELD *is a smart, sturdy, red-faced man of about fifty with an extremely hearty and jovial manner.*)

DOLLY.

This is my sister's reception room, sir.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.

And a charming reception room, too, I'm sure. May we smoke?

DOLLY.

Rather, sir!

RUPERT.

(*Going up to his uncle.*) How are you, Uncle Nicholas?

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.

(*Very warmly.*) Hullo, Rupert, my boy, here you are

—simply in clover. I've heard all about you—and how you've come down here pretending to be an agricultural labourer. Ha, ha! (*Laughs.*) It's the best joke I ever heard in my life. Got a soft thing on, I expect?

RUPERT.

On the contrary, I believe I'm growing quite horny-handed.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.

(*Jocosely.*) Nonsense! I only wish I'd time to take up your job. I suppose by now the ladies can't get on without you. You've made yourself indispensable, eh? The Simple Life! Just have suited me at your age!

(RUPERT *hands round a silver cigarette case.*)

RUPERT.

I don't need it. I was simple enough already when I came here.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.

Oh, you sly dog, you! (*To one of the others.*) This is my nephew, Joliffe—Mr Warriner—Major Joliffe. This lucky farm's got a lady bailiff—an awfully pretty girl—and the young blood's in clover down here, having a splendid time (*chuckles*), and then has the cheek to pretend he's too simple to enjoy it.

RUPERT.

You're quite mistaken, uncle. I came here seriously to do the "spade work of a pioneer." I was promised a kind of cowboy life in the wild Wild West. But I found there was rather too much cow, and not quite enough Wild West about it; so when next I want a thrill I suppose it will have to be motor racing.

(GWENDOLEN *comes down stairs. Two or three other officers drop in and salute.*)

DOLLY.

May I introduce you to my sister?

(*They bow.* DOLLY *is getting out the whisky-and-soda.*)

GWENDOLEN.

How do you do? My brother will already have told you that I'm afraid we've nothing better than milk to offer you. (*Catching sight of* DOLLY.) Whose whisky is that, pray?

DOLLY.

It's Rupert's own particular.

(GWENDOLEN *suddenly sees* RUPERT, *who is leaning forward lighting a cigarette at* COLONEL AMBERFIELD'S *match.*)

GWENDOLEN.

Warriner, what are you doing here?

DOLLY.

Now for the rag——

GWENDOLEN.

(*With extreme sharpness.*) Wasting your time and actually smoking when you ought to be carting manure! Go down at once and clean out the cow-sheds. (*With a look of mingled amusement and mortification* RUPERT *moves towards the door. To the others.*) If farm servants don't know their place, it becomes our duty to teach 'em.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT III

SCENE: *The same, a month later. The fire is lighted and in the rack above are pans of Cornish cream. A big poster with* "MEETING, VOTES FOR WOMEN," *printed in large letters is over the dresser.*

(CONNIE *enters breathless from outside and, running across to the kitchen door, calls.*)

CONNIE.
Mary Ellen! Mary Ellen!

MARY ELLEN.
(*Entering.*) Ess, my dear, what is ut, then?

CONNIE.
Is it true?

MARY ELLEN.
What?

CONNIE.
The men have struck?

MARY ELLEN.
(*Unperturbed.*) Ess, ut's true, I b'lieve.

CONNIE.
What are we to do next?

MARY ELLEN.

Don't 'ee ask me. I've got my work to do and the 'taters to peel for the dinner. But if you will have ut out, I say the missus must take a mate.

CONNIE.

(*Nose in air.*) Insufferable! (DOLLY *comes down stairs humming a tune.*) Have you heard?—the men have struck!

DOLLY.

(*Laughing.*) Jolly natural, I'm sure. I always struck when Gwen tried to boss me.

CONNIE.

What are we to do now?

DOLLY.

That's the point—what are we to do now? (*Lights a cigarette.*) First a cigarette! We must keep our hair on whatever happens. (*Sits on the edge of the table and swings his legs.*) Where's our stern employer? (*To* MARY ELLEN.) Where's Lady Gwendolen?

MARY ELLEN.

She were up a ladder book-l'arning one of the men how to thatch a hayrick. (*Goes out scornfully.*)

DOLLY.

Dear Gwen, so like her! She'll be teaching her grandmother to suck eggs next.

CONNIE.

It's shameful! I suppose it's simply because Gwen's too conscientious.

DOLLY.

(*Picking up newspaper.*) She's a bit of an amateur—Gwen is. Too doctrinaire!

CONNIE.

She's too thorough—too strict! Her farming's too scientific to be understood here.

DOLLY.

Farming's all rule of thumb—a male thumb, mind you! (*Enter* RUPERT *from outside. He is beautifully groomed and in Yeomanry Captain's uniform.*) Have you heard the latest?

RUPERT.

No.

DOLLY.

Your pals have all struck. Now, then, Mr Captain, the question is what do you do?

CONNIE.

The wretches have just given notice that if they don't have fourpence an hour for extra time, they'll all go over to Farmer Peters.

RUPERT.

I had a talk with them yesterday, and I was afraid it would come to that. The worst of it is I ought to be off in half-an-hour.

DOLLY.

(*Getting down.*) Look here, Rupert, we're not going to let you slink off like this and leave us all to be hacked in the scrum—not likely!

RUPERT.

But I'm due at camp this afternoon.

DOLLY.
Rat—rat—rat! (*He goes into scullery.*)

RUPERT.
Gwen must give in. There's no help for it.

CONNIE.
She won't.

RUPERT.
She must. She can't let the farm be deserted. Besides Briggs, the bailiff, wouldn't allow it.

CONNIE.
She'll never give in. It's a matter of principle. She suspects the fourpence is a mere excuse. She believes they want to get rid of her because she isn't a man.

RUPERT.
But she's awfully up-to-date. Her father says she's already more of a man than a woman.

CONNIE.
Nonsense! She's a thousand times better than any man, but the labourers won't see it.

RUPERT.
Possibly not—poor benighted creatures!
(*A knock—then* MRS TOLSON *and* MRS MAJORIBANKS *enter.* MRS TOLSON *is a clever, practical woman between fifty and sixty who "stands no nonsense" from any one. She is a pillar of Church and State—a Primrose Ruling Councillor, the autocrat of the parish, whose views and wishes—sensible in the main—brook no resistance.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
May we come in?

MRS TOLSON.
(*Speaking—as she always does—with crisp decision.*) Is Lady Gwendolen at home ?

CONNIE.
I think she's out in the fields. I'll go and look for her.
(*She goes out.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
(*Coming up to* RUPERT *with pleased surprise.*) Ah, how do you do ? I didn't know you in your spick-and-span uniform.

RUPERT.
Yes ! Washed and shaved and clothed—in my right mind at last. I'm just off for my training.

MRS TOLSON.
(*Seated.*) You are——

RUPERT.
One of the farm labourers.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
This is Mr Warriner, Maria (*introducing them*) ; Mr Warriner—Mrs Tolson.

MRS TOLSON.
I remember ! I've heard all about you. You've come down from Town to play at being a ploughboy here—ridiculous !

RUPERT.
(*With ardour.*) Do you know, I really think you're right !

MRS TOLSON.
(*On the high horse.*) Oh, indeed ! I usually am, thank you !

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
I'm staying with Mrs Tolson, and we've motored over to peep in at Gwen. (*Looking round.*) What a charming old place she's got to be sure—so ramshackle! With an art ceiling—and cream at her elbow—and everything snug. I call it quite *recherché*.

(*She wanders round the room lost in admiration.*)

MRS TOLSON.
I hoped to find Lady Gwendolen in. I should be glad to have an interview with her.

RUPERT.
Yes.

MRS TOLSON.
I am—(*correcting herself*)—my husband and I are seriously alarmed about the farm. We have reason to believe that things are going from bad to worse.

RUPERT.
Oh, I hope they're not as bad as that.

MRS TOLSON.
They are, or I shouldn't say so. I've just heard the men are about to strike.

RUPERT.
They want pay at an extra rate for working overtime.

MRS TOLSON.
It's most unusual!

RUPERT.
I know.

MRS TOLSON.
It's not given here. They're trying it on because she's

a newcomer and a noodle. Is it likely an unpractical, inexperienced girl like her could manage them ?

RUPERT.
What had she better do if the men go off ?

MRS TOLSON.
(*Ramming down her charge of common sense.*) Do ? Do nothing ! I'll speak to Briggs about it. He'll arrange the affair. I daresay she'll have to pay them something extra as a kind of bribe to stand her. Our men don't understand a titled lady farmer. They look on her as a rank intruder. I quite see their point of view. Her views — I understand — are — are positively Trafalgar Square. They won't do here. We expect ladies — if they can't behave like ladies—at least to behave like normal women.

RUPERT.
(*Hotly.*) She's simply splendid—a heroine !

MRS TOLSON.
Then I wish you'd give her a good talking to. Try to put some common sense into her head. I presume you're engaged to her ?

RUPERT.
Engaged ?

MRS TOLSON.
To be married.

RUPERT.
No.

MRS TOLSON.
Then your position here is ambiguous.

RUPERT.
(*Recklessly.*) Rather!

MRS TOLSON.
Incomprehensible.

RUPERT.
Utterly.

MRS TOLSON.
It would do her all the good in the world to be married. There's nothing like love to make a woman discover her sex. I should think you'd better take things in hand here. It might save us having to terminate the arrangement.

RUPERT.
(*Haughtily.*) The advice is not novel—but quite superfluous. I'm sorry I can't do more, but I have to be off to my Yeomanry.

MRS TOLSON.
(*Diplomatically, aside to* RUPERT.) Would you take the post if it were offered you?

RUPERT.
(*Horrified.*) Turn Gwen out? Great Heavens! no —certainly not!

MRS TOLSON.
(*Turning and seeing poster—she speaks with horror.*) Votes for Women—a meeting here this afternoon—scandalous! I forbid it!

RUPERT.
I beg your pardon.

MRS TOLSON.
Tell Lady Gwendolen, Mr Tolson and I decline to sanction the meeting.

RUPERT.
But the meeting's been publicly announced. You could hardly expect her to cancel it for a mere message.

MRS TOLSON.
I shall go back at once and see my husband about it. I'm sure he'll prohibit it.

RUPERT.
But isn't it rather high-handed at this time of day for a landlord to stop his tenant holding a meeting ?

MRS TOLSON.
Lady Gwendolen's not our tenant. She's our under-bailiff. Votes, indeed ! What do women want votes for ? I've no patience with them.

RUPERT.
I suppose they want votes—to vote with.

MRS TOLSON.
Fiddlesticks ! I can't wait any longer for Lady Gwendolen. (*To* MRS MAJORIBANKS.) Are you coming ?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
I'll stay on here for a little. Don't trouble to send the motor back. I should like to walk home across the fields.

MRS TOLSON.
Very well ! Don't be late for lunch. It's two o'clock sharp—remember ! (*She goes.*)

RUPERT.
Poor Gwen ! She'll get dismissed if she doesn't look out.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
They mean to chuck her. She should have minded her P's and Q's.

RUPERT.
I've done all I could. I've tried to be Gwen's right hand, but she doesn't see it.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
She wouldn't! She's much too proud of having two hands of her own.

RUPERT.
I'm glad to be off to camp, because—to tell you the truth—I'm getting a bit tired of my folly.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Oh, don't say folly! I call it most spirited. You're sure to win in the end.

RUPERT.
(*A little stiffly.*) How do you mean?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Don't be stiff and touchy with me. I'm a kind of beneficent witch. That is why young people confide their love troubles to me. I'm so clever at match-making—I've made some of the unhappiest marriages in London.

RUPERT.
It's humiliating to have one's tenderest feelings gossiped out. I believe it's partly that which has made Gwen so *difficile*. She publicly snubbed me the other day, and though I've been able to help her in various ways, we're still on the coldest of terms. The more I do, the more she seems to consider I'm trying to put her under an obligation. And so pride prevents her from showing her gratitude.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
It may be her way of showing an affection she's ashamed of.

RUPERT.
(*Warming as he thinks of his loyalty and treatment.*) Let her show her affection in some other way, then. One would think, instead of being a pioneer, she was some legendary Provençal chatelaine, and I was her page or her jester. But I'm not a Petrarch ; I'm not in the least fourteenth century ; and I'm getting tired of serving my liege lady without winning even an eyelash in return.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
The jester must give her tit for tat. Stand on your dignity. The one thing a woman admires in a man is strength of purpose.

RUPERT.
You're right. I won't knock under.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Don't. She'll be low-spirited for a bit when she's turned out of here. That's your chance. Seize it, and make her heart-whole again. Turn the tables on her !

RUPERT.
How ?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
By heaping coals of fire on her head.

RUPERT.
It'll take loads and loads of that sort of thing to melt her. (*Suddenly.*) I have it. I'll ask my uncle to make her his agent's junior. She might devil for the man or whatever it's called. I'll write to-morrow.

(DOLLY *comes in from the scullery carrying a big pan of cream.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

My dear Dolly, you here! (*Going up to him.*) Busy as a bee!

DOLLY.

(*Retreating.*) Now don't try to kiss me or you'll spill the cream.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

It looks lovely. (*He crosses and puts it on the rack.*) But how were they rash enough to entrust you with a pailful, Dolly?

DOLLY.

Our cheese girl dared me to do it. I have to show 'em down here now and then who are the Lords of Creation.

RUPERT.

(*Shaking hands with* MRS MAJORIBANKS.) Good-bye. I mayn't see you again, so good-bye, Dolly. Mind you look after Gwen when the crash comes.

(*Goes into scullery.*)

DOLLY.

(*Lighting a cigarette.*) When the crash comes? What's up?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Poor Gwen—she mayn't be here much longer!

DOLLY.

(*With mock solemnity.*) Why, darling? I hope you don't think she's about to be taken from us—do you? Let us pray she may long be spared.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

The Tolsons think this farm swallows up dear Gwen's talents. They want her to look out for "fresh fields and pastures new."

DOLLY.

Oh, I say, Aunt Sophia!—won't she be mad when she finds she's got the chuck?

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Mrs Tolson tells me privately they mean to offer the farm to Rupert. But you mustn't breathe a whisper—not to a creature—promise! Mum's the word. I've only just dropped a hint in the strictest confidence, so that you might help poor Gwen when the chuck — as you call it—comes.

DOLLY.

All right, depend on me. I won't give you away, darling—honest Injun. (*Enter* CONNIE *down stairs.*) Miss Wantage—my aunt, Mrs Majoribanks. (*To* MRS MAJORIBANKS.) Miss Wantage is our own particular cheese girl.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

Oh, how delicious that sounds. It quite makes one's mouth water. I must start a dairy myself. It's such a convenient place for having afternoon tea in. But it's time I was slipping away. Good-bye, Miss Wantage. (*Going.*) Give dear Gwen my love, and tell her I'm so sorry I've missed her. (*Looks round.*) What a charming room this would be for a mothers' meeting!

CONNIE.

Mothers' meeting, indeed! They only make women parasites. To-day we've something much better than that. Gwen's going to have a suffragist meeting at three. This village is so benighted—even the women don't realise they're in fetters—so Gwen is holding a meeting to teach them their rights.

DOLLY.

Do come! It's such frightful fun when Gwen's on the spout! You could help to put her up a tree with questions.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

You don't know—I've just became a hot suffragist myself. It's quite the latest smart thing in Town. A tea cup and saucer crusade—preached in the very best drawing-rooms. (*Goes out.*)

DOLLY.

How jolly it is here, helping you all to farm. (*He gets out some of* GWENDOLEN'S *account books and looks at them vaguely while he smokes.*) I once thought of taking up farming myself. The dad hoped it might keep me out of mischief; but I had mercy on his poor pocket, and declined.

CONNIE.

(*Getting out a jacket she is making and sitting down to sew.*) Have you been helping us? I've not observed it.

DOLLY.

(*Pointing to pan.*) Look! If it hadn't been for me, where would that cream be now? Besides, I'm helping Gwen's books to keep straight. I want to help you too. (*Gallantly.*) Mayn't I come and pat the butter?

CONNIE.

Would you like to come and help me sell it?

DOLLY.

I don't know. How do you do it?

CONNIE.

I sit at a stall all day haggling round the market price. When I take a wholesale order, I have to go to a public-house to get paid for it over a drink. I always insist on ginger-beer, but the whole transaction degrades a woman.

DOLLY.

(*Brightening.*) Why, of course! I could go and get

all your drinks for you, couldn't I? I'd be delighted to make myself useful.

CONNIE.
You shall! Are you staying on much longer?

DOLLY.
I don't know. Are any of us staying on much longer? That's the point.

CONNIE.
I'm here till winter. Then I'm off to Rome to study Italian and classical art.

DOLLY.
I only hope they'll let you stay on after Gwen's departure.

CONNIE.
What do you mean?

DOLLY.
It's a dreadful deadly secret. But the Tolsons are going to give Gwen the sack.

CONNIE.
(*Much shocked.*) It's shameful. I suppose it's her sex that has done it.

DOLLY.
(*Heroically.*) Women may say what they like, but they can't get on without us. (*Looking at a paper.*) Surrey's doing well, isn't it?

CONNIE.
I didn't know that it was—so especially.

DOLLY.
Why, of course! Adams got one hundred and forty yesterday. They'll have to "declare."

CONNIE.
Are you talking of cricket ?

DOLLY.
What else is there left to talk about ?

CONNIE.
How can you talk about cricket when you've just heard of poor Gwen's misfortune ?

DOLLY.
First-class cricket is far more important than Gwen, any day. When I was at school they always kept learning in its proper place. They never let work interfere with games. So I wasn't a rank bat in my day and quite a decent square-leg. But I had to work too hard at my crammer's. The reading rot put out my eye for bowling ; and now I'm simply putrid !

CONNIE.
What did they try to teach you—intelligence ?

DOLLY.
No ; stuffed me with useless knowledge. I've never opened a book since I left, I promise you ! I've no time nowadays to read anything but the sporting news in the papers, thank goodness !

(GWENDOLEN *hurries in from the garden in a state of great perturbation.*)

GWENDOLEN.
(*Considerably flustered.*) Where's Rupert ? I want him at once.

DOLLY.
Don't know ! What's the matter ?

GWENDOLEN.
The men have struck and Briggs has been most impertinent. I want Rupert to speak to them.

DOLLY.

Rupert—Rupert—it's always Rupert! Shall I go and quell them? (*Brightly.*) If I don't succeed—I suppose we shall have all the railways in England on strike to-morrow—a sympathetic strike!—there'll be a jolly responsibility for you, Gwen!

GWENDOLEN.

Don't be silly. (*Goes to scullery door and calls.*) Where's Mr Warriner?

MARY ELLEN'S VOICE.

Lor', my dear! I be too busy cooking the meat to be keeping an eye on your young man.

GWENDOLEN.

Go and find him at once, Mary Ellen. (*Turning to Dolly.*) I've been thinking things over, Dolly, and now that Rupert has been commanded to join his Yeomanry, and the men have struck, I've made up my mind to offer you his situation. It'll do you a lot of good.

DOLLY.

Thanks, Gwen! It's awfully sweet of you to make me the offer and think of my good, and all that. I should love to be one of your blacklegs, but I've just got another appointment. I'm booked to help Miss Wantage in the butter trade. She must have some one to swallow her drinks.

CONNIE.

(*Demurely.*) So Mr Dennis has most generously placed his "red lane," etc., at my disposal.

(RUPERT *comes in from scullery.* CONNIE *goes upstairs.* DOLLY *out.*)

GWENDOLEN.

You've heard about the men?

RUPERT.
Yes.

GWENDOLEN.
The poor, besotted creatures don't respect me because I'm a woman. They won't adapt themselves to our new conditions. (*Grandly.*) *Let them wait till we've got the vote.*

(*She goes about tidying the room, putting away* DOLLY'S *newspaper, etc.*)

RUPERT.
The agricultural brain is obtuse. It shies at new conditions. I don't think it yet comprehends the *régime* of a Daughter of Ceres.

GWENDOLEN.
(*On the edge of despair.*) They don't—and they won't! I can't help that. But I'm sure it's Briggs that's stirring them up. I want to consult you about him. He doesn't appreciate me. I believe he's jealous.

RUPERT.
You're too industrious—too efficient.

GWENDOLEN.
I'm sure of it. He's a bad, narrow, low-minded man with the most degraded views about women.

RUPERT.
(*Sentimentally.*) Yes, in his primitive way he probably still regards them as something tender, to be loved and protected. We must forgive him that because he probably knows no better. (*Sadly.*) I knew no better once.

GWENDOLEN.
You'll never learn your lesson. Do you know what Briggs is doing at this very moment? I believe he's bribing them—bribing them to return to work!

RUPERT.
You couldn't let the farm be deserted? You must give in.

GWENDOLEN.
It's the fashion, I know, among men; but I was determined not to. I did it on principle, and instead of backing me up he defied me. He wouldn't let me speak to the men—my men! He said I'd do more harm than good—the brute!

RUPERT.
The brute!

GWENDOLEN.
(*Gratefully.*) Thank you, Rupert; I'm sorry you're going.

RUPERT.
It's good of you to say that, Gwen.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Once more matter-of-fact.*) Though it is humiliating for a farmer to have to seek advice and assistance from one of her own day labourers.

RUPERT.
(*Feeling himself rebuffed.*) Then I may as well tell you now as at any time that the day labourer means to resign his post.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Calmly.*) Wouldn't that be a pity—just when you were beginning to make yourself of some value? You know that I've broken with the Feudal System—I was hoping you, too, had begun to cast off its fetters.

RUPERT.
I wasn't aware I was in them.

GWENDOLEN.

You are—you all are! You're brought up to wear them like that on purpose—so that you mayn't hear them clank. Your whole education is a mere monastic survival. It blinds you to what the world is to-day—what it's going to be to-morrow. But I warn you—the day of universal co-education isn't very far off.

RUPERT.

Nice for the girls, I daresay! But have you no pity on the boys?

GWENDOLEN.

It will be the making of them—they'll be put in their place. Look at America! (*With a burst of satisfaction.*) There, men are being taught to find their proper level—and we are finding ours.

RUPERT.

(*Coming over to her.*) I shall have to be off very soon.

GWENDOLEN.

Aren't you staying for my meeting?

RUPERT.

I'm afraid I can't.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Indignantly.*) You don't wish to—dog-in-the-manger! *You've* got a vote!

RUPERT.

(*With a carelessness almost wicked.*) Have I? I'd quite forgotten it.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Still more indignant.*) Forgotten it—forgotten it! So like a man! Why, if I had a vote—I'd—I'd—I think I could die quite happy!

RUPERT.

(*Coming over to her.*) We mayn't see each other again. I don't want to keep talking to you about my feelings; it only seems to bore you. But you know what they are—and always will be.

GWENDOLEN.

And you know mine—so I think there's nothing more to be said.

RUPERT.

No, nothing. But there's one question I would like to ask before I go. Do you mean never to marry?

GWENDOLEN.

(*More gently.*) Don't imagine I'm one of the women who regard wedlock as a mere servile survival. Tho' I must say it's lamentable to see so many brilliant women's careers daily ruined by a man and a family. But I do think that marriage for us is only a second best—an alternative to fall back on, if we fail in our higher ambitions.

RUPERT.

(*Rather sadly.*) Then I'm afraid there's but little hope for me. You'd never be content with the second best.

GWENDOLEN.

No—not while I had the first.

RUPERT.

(*Tenderly.*) Ah, Gwen—don't forget me—should you ever lose the first. (*He turns to go—then suddenly remembering.*) Oh, by the way, Mrs Tolson was here. She asked me to tell you the meeting mustn't be held.

GWENDOLEN.

What?

RUPERT.
She presumes to forbid the meeting.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Boiling with indignation.*) How dare she! Did you turn her out neck and crop on the spot for her insolence?

RUPERT.
(*Protesting.*) My dear Gwen—your landlady!

GWENDOLEN.
The merest man who was what's called a man would have hounded her out—the old cat!

RUPERT.
It would only have made matters worse. I had to consider you.

GWENDOLEN.
Coward! I dismiss you from my service.

RUPERT.
May I ask for a character?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Fiercely.*) No!
(*She turns to go. He unhooks her hat from a peg and holds it out with an air of half-playful propitiation.*)

RUPERT.
Your hat!

GWENDOLEN.
(*Waving it aside.*) Surely you know no decent woman wears a hat in the country nowadays. We're not so effeminate.
(*She goes out.* RUPERT *goes into scullery. After a few moments* LORD HELFORD, LADY ELIZABETH, *and* LADY JANE *enter slowly and inquisitively from the garden and gaze about with the utmost curiosity and interest.*)

LADY ELIZABETH.
Nobody here!

LADY JANE.
Gwen seems to have got a snuggish den.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Impressively.*) I trust that it gives her sphere an ample scope.

LADY ELIZABETH.
(*Examining the music on the piano.*) Richard Strauss —Tchaikowski!

LADY JANE.
(*Examining the books on the dresser.*) Maeterlinck —Turgenieff—*La Princesse Lointaine*, Rostand.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Looking at pictures.*) Burne Jones—Botticelli!

ALL THREE.
(*Quite overcome by the volume of culture.*) Well, I never!

LADY JANE.
Gwen must be on the self-improvement tack.

LADY ELIZABETH.
(*Going up to fire.*) The mysteries of Cornish cream. (*Puts in her finger.*) Oh, it's hot! (*Sucks it.*)

LORD HELFORD.
(*Who has been studying the Votes for Women poster with horror.*) Elizabeth, Jane—what's this?

BOTH.
Gwen's got a meeting——

LADY JANE.
This afternoon—glorious!

LADY ELIZABETH.
We shall be able to support her.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Majestically.*) I forbid you both to be present.

LADY JANE.
Nonsense, father—forbid, indeed! Why, you'll probably have to take the Chair.
(*He sinks overwhelmed into a seat.* MARY ELLEN *is seen in the garden. She calls to* CONNIE.)

MARY ELLEN.
Miss Wantage, do 'ee come down, then, quick! Here be a passel of gentry a-fingering all our things as tho' they were a-setting in their own kitchen.
(CONNIE *comes downstairs.*)

LORD HELFORD.
I am Lady Gwendolen's father—these are her sisters. (*They bow.*) Nice little place you've got here.

LADY JANE.
At last one can appreciate the phrase — a highly-cultivated farm.

CONNIE.
(*Briskly.*) One must have something in one's odd moments to rub off the rust, you know.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Solemnly.*) When I was young, nobody rubbed off their rust on Burne Jones and Botticelli.

CONNIE.
No. If they rubbed it off at all, I always imagine they rubbed it off on each other. I suppose you've come down for Gwen's meeting?

LORD HELFORD.
Certainly not! We've come for tea.

CONNIE.
(*Goes to scullery door and calls.*) Tea for every one, Mary Ellen, after the meeting. (*Enter* MARY ELLEN.) Lady Gwendolen's father and sisters have come down here for one of your real Cornish teas.

MARY ELLEN.
(*Curtsying.*) How are 'ee, my dears, then? 'Tis brave and fine when lords and ladies come down from Lunnon to take tea with the likes of we.
(*She pushes back table and arranges chairs, etc.*)

CONNIE.
I'll go and find Gwen. (*She goes out.*)

LORD HELFORD.
And how is my daughter getting on in her new vocation? Is she progressing?

MARY ELLEN.
Progressin' on the road to the work'ouse. Ess, poor dear—she do her best. But 'ow should fine Lunnon ladies like her know a pig from a whistle?

LADY JANE.
(*Firing up.*) My sister's extremely efficient—extremely capable; perhaps you don't know she's been to an Agricultural College?

MARY ELLEN.
(*Shaking her head.*) Dear, dear—'as she, poor soul! That's what's done ut, then! No farmers go to college, as ever I 'eard of. If it weren't for me and Mr Warriner she'd be in a nice 'ole by now—I b'lieve.

LORD HELFORD.

I suppose Mr Warriner gives her a great deal of assistance ?

MARY ELLEN.

'E be looking after 'er day and night—keeping 'er out of scrapes. And I do 'ear as 'ow she's consented to let 'im look after 'er for better or worse. There'll be a fine weddin' 'ere soon, I'm thinking.

(*She brings in chairs from the scullery.*)

LORD HELFORD.

(*To* LADY JANE.) That's a weight off my mind. Gwen's is exactly the sort of restless, unsatisfied nature that needs a husband.

LADIES JANE AND ELIZABETH.

(*In horror.*) Father ! (DOLLY *enters.*)

DOLLY.

Hallo, dad ; come to spy out the land ? (*Shakes hands with his father and kisses his sisters.*) I'm doing a bit of farming myself.

LORD HELFORD.

Dear Gwen—how fortunate ! With two gentlemen helps like you and Rupert.

DOLLY.

Oh, but I'm not a bit like Rupert. Rupert only does manual labour, while I do the headwork—cooking her milk books and that kind of thing. (*To* LADY ELIZABETH.) How's the shop ?

LORD HELFORD.

Elizabeth has had the temerity to open business premises——

LADY ELIZABETH.

(*With all the frankness of her class.*) Shop, father—please say "shop." I'm proud of my shop.

LORD HELFORD.

— Shop, with "Madame Denise et Cie." glaring over the window.

DOLLY.

(*To* LADY JANE.) Still resting?

LADY JANE.

Dear, no! I'm in a fit-up Company on the road at Bodmin. The *Josiah* Company—number three.

LORD HELFORD.

(*Witheringly.*) Jane, I'm given to understand, has been lucky enough to be raised to the rank of a maid-of-all-work in a comic show with the inscrutable title of *Buck Up, Josiah!*

LADY JANE.

(*Enthusiastically.*) A rubbishy piece, of course, but an awful success. We've billed it beautifully. We had the luck to get an odd lot of posters cheap when *The Girl of Pekin* bust up, and they're drawing turn-away houses.

(GWENDOLEN *hastens in joyously and kisses them.*)

GWENDOLEN.

Ah, how are you—how are you all? This is delightful! But you've come on a bad day for me; the men struck this morning.

LORD HELFORD.

How unfortunate!

GWENDOLEN.

And then the bailiff bribed them back over my head.

LORD HELFORD.
How fortunate!

GWENDOLEN.
Not at all! It's an added insult. But you've come just in time for my meeting. It's about to begin.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Warningly.*) My dear, you know me!

GWENDOLEN.
And you'll take the Chair.

LORD HELFORD.
I? Certainly not!
(*His is the fascinated horror of the rabbit caught by the serpent's eye.*)

GWENDOLEN.
Yes, you will.

LORD HELFORD.
With my position in the country I couldn't countenance anything so unconstitutional. "Votes for Women," indeed—the mere poster is a danger to the State.

GWENDOLEN.
(*With the calmness of a master will.*) It's all settled, father! Don't let us have a family wrangle before the villagers, please!
(*The villagers begin to drop in.* GWENDOLEN *helps to show them their places.*)

DOLLY.
Here! here!

LORD HELFORD.
(*Majestic as ever.*) It's my duty to refuse. And when it's a question of duty, Gwen, you know I'm adamant. I'm Roman! I stand for the *patria potestas*.

LADIES JANE AND ELIZABETH.

(*Modern children tired of a wilful and disobedient parent.*) Oh, father, shut up!

(*They push him into a chair.*)

GWENDOLEN.

(*With awful meaning.*) You may be in the next Government, remember. It will be *much* more comfortable for you then, if you're *known* to have taken chairs at meetings like mine. (*Coming to him.*) The people are here. (CONNIE *comes in.*)

LORD HELFORD.

(*With the born chairman's voice.*) Then I reluctantly consent with the hope that I may be instrumental in restraining this meeting from doing anything foolish. I trust I may sterilise the mischief. My daughters seem to forget that "she who rocks the cradle rules the world."

LADY JANE.

I don't know why we're always having cradles and babies thrown in our teeth.

LADY ELIZABETH.

Women have something better than babies to think about nowadays.

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, indeed! How are you to reduce your golf handicap if you've got a family? (*Every one is now seated except* GWENDOLEN. *She opens the meeting.*) Villagers and sisters, I have the pleasure of telling you that my father, Lord Helford, has kindly consented to take the Chair at our meeting this afternoon. (*Faint applause.*)

LORD HELFORD.

(*In a state of resigned despair—aside to* GWENDOLEN.) Ah, what would my old colleagues in the Government

say to this? (*Aloud in an official voice.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I'm afraid you see me here in a very false position——

DOLLY.
Here! here!

LORD HELFORD.
False position. (*Rising.*) In my day I've helped to grasp the helm of State and steer our good ship England through perilous waters. If I may pursue the metaphor —where were the ladies then? Withdrawn within the sheltered saloons of Domesticity (*getting bothered*) leaning on our strong right arms—I should say—looking up with meek reverence to our manly wisdom. Where are they now? (*Emphatically.*) Too many, I fear, are mutineers—in the cockpit.

GWENDOLEN.
Be quiet, father, and let me speak.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Protesting.*) Really, my dear, a Chairman, you know —a Chairman is a Chairman! You can't dispute the ruling of the Chair.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Recklessly.*) Oh, yes, we can. There's nothing we women can't dispute. (*With fluent eloquence.*) My friends, I've asked you all to come to our meeting this afternoon to join me in a protest against the subjection of a sex—once called the weaker. What are we now, I ask you—what are we?

DOLLY.
(*Irrepressible as ever.*) Dear, delightful girls. "Put me among the girls."

GWENDOLEN.
Slaves, nothing but slaves! (*Growing warmer and*

warmer.) We belong to the dim, dumb multitude who are treated and ruled as though they were chattels, without a voice in their own or their children's fate. (*With scorn.*) I oughtn't, I know, to say *their* children. Legally no woman has a child of her own ; it belongs to the Man—her husband.

CONNIE, LADIES ELIZABETH AND JANE.
Shame ! shame !

GWENDOLEN.
You know Taxation without Representation is unjust—unjust and un-English ; that's why the American colonists rebelled. They emptied their tea chests into Boston Harbour. We are going to empty ours into the Cabinet. And I herewith warn the Cabinet that they'll get something worse than tea very soon. If they don't give us our Rights at once, bones will be broken——

DOLLY.
You mean parasols.

GWENDOLEN.
—and blood will flow.

DOLLY.
From the nose of the peaceful and patient policeman —poor devil !

GWENDOLEN.
(*With immense emphasis.*) They are face to face with the greatest crisis the world has ever seen. It is the resurrection of a buried sex ! (*Applause.*)

CONNIE, LADIES ELIZABETH AND JANE.
Here—here !

MARY ELLEN.
(*Solemnly.*) 'Tis the sarpint tempting Eve again !

TRESISE.
(*Emboldened by the metaphor to speak.*) Women know nout 'bout voting—they ain't got the wits!

RETALLACK.
(*Happy to back up his sex.*) We an't going to let 'em rule over we—not likely!

TRESISE.
Let 'em stay at 'ome and nurse the baby, then; that's what they're made for.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Catching the hateful word "baby" which so often chokes her best arguments.*) Nurse the baby, indeed—insulting!

LADIES JANE AND ELIZABETH.
Most insulting!

LORD HELFORD.
I really must ask for silence. Any of our friends can afterwards move an amendment in favour of Home and Motherhood.

DOLLY.
(*With indecent levity.*) Mine's ready now. I move Gwen shuts up.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Beginning to get hot.*) I appeal to all the women here! Look at those two poor, fuddled, illiterate men over there.

TRESISE.
(*All his manhood rising.*) I won't be nagged at by a woman—whoever she is. Duck 'em in the horse-pond, I say!

GWENDOLEN.
Again, look at this beardless boy!

DOLLY.
(*With the horrid coolness of the aristocratic brother.*) Get off the tiles, Gwen, get off the tiles.

GWENDOLEN.
—This perfumed stripling! They have the legal right to rule over you and me. They *do* rule over us. They treat us as though we were criminals, imbeciles, children! It would be laughable if it weren't so shocking.

CONNIE, LADIES JANE AND ELIZABETH.
Shame!

DOLLY.
(*Beginning to lose his temper and standing up.*) 'Pon my word, you're getting a bit too thick—too personal, Gwen. I'm not going to stand your rot. (*To the Meeting.*) I appeal to all you men here—if you're sensible chaps—do you wish your wives to vote against you?

FIRST MAN. (*Simultaneously.*) We bean't going to 'ave it!
SECOND MAN. (*Simultaneously.*) Let 'em try, that's all!
TRESISE. (*Simultaneously.*) Ducking-stool—horsepond—horsepond!

FIRST WOMAN.
I've no time for voting or any such foolishness.

SECOND WOMAN.
If they want to give us something, let 'em give us new boots. (*There is growing confusion.*)

LORD HELFORD.
(*Appealing to the Meeting.*) I really must ask our good friends to be quiet and let my misguided daughter finish her very inflammatory speech.

LADY ELIZABETH (*Simultaneously.*) It's shameful of you, father, not to back Gwen up in public. You know perfectly well we're going to have votes, so you'd better make the best of it.

DOLLY. I'm not going to let Gwen abuse me in public. I won't shut up for any one—there!

GWENDOLEN. (*Simultaneously with* LADY ELIZABETH *and* DOLLY.) Fellow women, you at least will listen to me. We need not heed these unmanly interruptions. The men, as usual, are trying to silence us with brute force.

LORD HELFORD. Silence, silence! I must have silence. The Chair calls for silence.

(*Every one is now on his feet. There is great confusion. Enter* MRS TOLSON, *almost rigid with wrath. There is an instant hush.*)

MRS TOLSON.
This meeting stops!

LORD HELFORD.
(*Fussy and apologetic.*) Certainly—certainly. It ought to have stopped before—it began!

GWENDOLEN.
(*Coming forward with dignity.*) My father, Lord Helford—Mrs Tolson. My father has kindly taken the Chair to support us.

MRS TOLSON.
(*Recovering her tongue.*) I'm very much surprised to find a man in your position presiding at such tomfoolery.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Helpless.*) So am I—so am I.

MRS TOLSON.
(*To* GWENDOLEN.) Did you get my message forbidding the meeting ?

GWENDOLEN.
Certainly.

MRS TOLSON.
And in spite of that you dared to defy me ?

GWENDOLEN.
I couldn't do otherwise. I felt it my duty. It's a matter of conscience.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Blandly.*) Hadn't we better dismiss our village friends ?

MRS TOLSON.
The sooner the better.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Aloud to the villagers.*) Good-afternoon. Will you kindly pass out quietly one by one. Do not crowd in the doorway, please. (*The villagers begin to file out. To* MRS TOLSON.) I must explain to you that my daughter is a very well brought up young lady. You mustn't run away with the idea that she means all she says. Women, you know, are ruled by their hearts and not their heads.

MRS TOLSON.
You mean some women are—there are fools in both sexes !

DOLLY.
Hot stuff—hot stuff !

IKMd. Ld. FERN Moore

MRS TOLSON.

Votes for women, indeed! What do they want them for, I should like to know?

GWENDOLEN.

(*Enthusiastically.*) To aid social reform. To better the lot of women and children. To help the weak and suffering!

MRS TOLSON.

A woman can always make men do what she wants if she's clever enough. I find no difficulty.

GWENDOLEN.

(*With the passion of rapturous sacrifice.*) And then there's imprisonment—martyrdom! I dream day and night of the sanctification of prison.

MRS TOLSON

Don't be hysterical!

TRESISE.

(*The last to leave, sends a parting shot from the door.*) Let 'er wait till she's got Mr Rupert for master!

DOLLY.

(*Rubbing it in.*) Master! Did you hear that, Gwen? —master!

LORD HELFORD.

Yes. Rupert will soon shut you up if you talk like that.

GWENDOLEN.

I don't understand you.

LADY JANE.

Your servant has just told us you're going to marry Rupert.

LADY ELIZABETH.
But it isn't true, is it ? I hope not.

GWENDOLEN.
(*With the utmost indignation.*) Of course not ! Abom inable ! It's all those scandal-mongering rustics. They can't understand any relationship between woman and man that isn't sexual. (*On the edge of tears, she throws herself into a chair.*) I've already had to dismiss him. And now I shall hardly dare to speak to him in future. (*Bursting out.*) Sex—sex—sex ! How I hate the very thought of sex ! I wish there were no such thing.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Soothingly.*) I'm sure, my dear, you're doing your best to abolish it.

MRS TOLSON.
I've been discussing your case with my husband, and I'm sorry to say we've come to the conclusion that your tenancy here must terminate.

GWENDOLEN.
Does that mean I'm dismissed ?

MRS TOLSON.
I'm afraid it does. Quite apart from your flagrant defiance this afternoon, we find you can't manage the men or make the place pay.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Bitterly.*) No one helps a woman. Every one beats her down when she tries to do something worthy. The most cruel are always women—to women.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Coming forward at last to protect his daughter.*) But really, my dear Mrs Tolson, isn't this procedure somewhat sudden—a little high-handed ?

LADY ELIZABETH. (*Simultaneously rushing at her.*) Shameful! I think Gwen's been disgracefully used.

LADY JANE. (*Simultaneously rushing at her.*) Scandalous! I hope Gwen will clear out and leave the beastly place.

DOLLY. (*Simultaneously rushing at her.*) Don't forget you belong to the charming sex yourself.

MRS TOLSON.

(*Retreating with the indignation of a landed proprietor.*) Is this your farm—or mine?

GWENDOLEN.

(*Planting her blow with bitter resentment.*) At present it's called your husband's!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

IRMa

ACT IV

SCENE: *The same as Act I. It is about eleven in the morning of an August day.* GWENDOLEN, CONNIE, *and* LADY ELIZABETH *are sitting gloomily in the foreground.* DOLLY *is lying at full length on the sofa with a book.*

GWENDOLEN.
I intend to get at the truth of my dismissal. (*To* CONNIE.) You seem to have known of it beforehand.

LADY ELIZABETH.
You all seemed to have known of it beforehand.

DOLLY.
(*Looking up.*) We did—we did.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Nettled.*) Why didn't you tell me ?

DOLLY.
It was a deadly secret. Aunt Sophia let it out, but made us swear to be mum.

GWENDOLEN.
Did Rupert know it ?

DOLLY.
'Course he did !

IRMA LA, FERN. Moore

GWENDOLEN.
How do you know ?

DOLLY.
He said to me when he was going: "Look after Gwen when the crash comes."

GWENDOLEN.
(*Bitterly.*) He knew all about it and never warned me —so like a man !

LADY ELIZABETH.
We must sift the affair to the very bottom. What did you mean, Dolly, yesterday when you said to Gwen: "Can't you make a shot at some one who'd like to slip into your shoes" ?

DOLLY.
Only one of my rotters !

GWENDOLEN.
(*To* CONNIE.) Now that you're engaged to Dolly, you'll have to explain him.

CONNIE.
You ought to know Dolly's jokes by this time.

GWENDOLEN.
I do—too well, poor, weak, little things. But this wasn't one of them.

CONNIE.
I suppose he was wondering—if you'd got an idea—that there might be some one—who wanted to stand in your shoes.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Haughtily.*) Don't keep beating about the bush, Connie, please ! What's the use of being engaged to a

man—I should like to know—if you can't read his inmost thoughts ?

DOLLY.
(*Looking up.*) To save a row I'll face the music. I meant they'd offered the place to Rupert.

GWENDOLEN.
And he accepted ?

DOLLY.
How should I know ? But Rupert's a sly old bird ; he knows which side his bread is buttered.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Breaking out.*) He's sure to. If he hadn't wanted the place, he'd have warned me. I'll never forgive him—never !

CONNIE.
(*With the true kindness of plainest speech.*) Perhaps he hoped that adversity might soften you. He had to choose a desperate remedy.

DOLLY.
He knows it's no use making love to you as he would to another woman. You're so awfully stony—that's what you are, Gwen—too stony.

GWENDOLEN.
Hardly the most tactful way to melt a stone.

CONNIE.
(*Still with the frankness of friendship.*) Had he a chance while you were successful ? You said yourself you'd never take a husband while you had the ball at your feet.

GWENDOLEN.
He has certainly no chance now.

DOLLY.

He's a kind-hearted chap. I daresay he wanted to get your nose off the grindstone.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Loftily.*) I think we had better drop the subject. The whole thing is too repugnant for further discussion.

DOLLY.

(*Rising.*) Well, if you're going to ride the high horse it's time I went and fagged at my notes of thanks. Beastly nuisance it is—acknowledging wedding presents. I never know what to say. (*Strolls out.*)

GWENDOLEN.

(*To* CONNIE.) Since you've let yourself down to be silly with Dolly, I'm afraid you're forgetting what's due to us.

CONNIE.

Not at all! But now I'm engaged myself, I'm able to pity poor Rupert. Why don't you make it up and farm together? (GWENDOLEN *rises and walks up the room not speaking.*) Of course we're equal to men in capacity, and finer in character, and all that—but still a farm, you know, does run more smoothly with a master.

(GWENDOLEN, *sitting down, does not condescend to answer.* LORD HELFORD *and* MRS MAJORIBANKS *come in. The former stands with his back to the fireplace; the latter runs up to* CONNIE *effusively.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

I've just popped in for a minute to wish you every happiness. (*Takes her hand.*) Dolly's the very pick of men for a husband—one in a thousand!

CONNIE.

One in five hundred millions!

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
And he's a lucky man, too. It isn't every man who gets a wife who can make his cheeses for him.

LORD HELFORD.
Now that Adolphus is engaged, he ought to do some work.

CONNIE AND GWENDOLEN.
Dolly *must* do some work!

LORD HELFORD.
And I hope you'll use all your influence with him, Miss Wantage.

CONNIE.
Most decidedly! I'm afraid he's not clever enough for a farmer; so I shall insist on his making you get him a clerkship in the House of Commons, or something like that.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
O poor Dolly! Think of the late hours, and bad air—and all the rough and tumble. His health would never stand it!

LORD HELFORD.
(*Nettled.*) The health of the Cabinet has to stand it —my health has to stand it, Sophia!

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
The Cabinet's more robust than Dolly. Besides, if its health is knocked up by the House, we can always get another. Can't you call him a private secretary, and dump him down on a Privy-Councillor, Henry? He's cut out for the part.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Resignedly.*) I can't understand how it is, but

nowadays all the girls seem rabid for work, and all the young men for pleasure. I suppose it's all part of the transposition of the sexes.

CONNIE.
It's the problem our century has to face!

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Then your young people are well up in the century, Henry! (*To* CONNIE.) Have the presents begun to tumble in?

CONNIE.
They're just beginning.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
I must have a peep. The first ones are so exciting. They'll soon be nothing more than a number on a list —you'll hardly care to look at them.
(*They go into the back room together.* COLONEL AMBERFIELD *is announced and enters briskly.*)

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
How-dy-do? How-dy-do?

LORD HELFORD.
(*To the* FOOTMAN, *while* COLONEL AMBERFIELD *is shaking hands.*) Where's Harris now?

FOOTMAN.
(*Hesitating.*) Lady Elizabeth has invited Mr Harris to her—institution, my lord.

LADY ELIZABETH.
I sent him round to the shop.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
(*Warmly to* GWENDOLEN.) Welcome back to civilisation! The lap of luxury is better than being bogged in a furrow, eh?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Very coldly.*) I'm taking a rest at present.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
(*To* LORD HELFORD.) I'd keep her resting, Helford, if I were you. I'd never have a lady-bailiff grubbing about a farm of mine, I can tell you! Too much waste of charming material. We can't spare the ladies; they're far too pretty and precious for that.

LORD HELFORD.
I wish my girls appreciated the value of good looks more.

GWENDOLEN.
We leave that to Dolly!

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
And who is to be in charge of the farm?

GWENDOLEN.
I've just learnt that it's to be Mr Warriner.

LORD HELFORD.
I daresay you're a bit disappointed, Gwen, but it's the best thing for you both in the long run. He'll make a sound farmer——

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
And it will give the fellow something to do. He needed an aim in life.

(RUPERT *is announced, and entering shakes hands all round.* GWENDOLEN *receives him with ostentatious coolness and defiantly lights a cigarette.*)

LORD HELFORD.
It's a long time since we've seen you.

RUPERT.
Yes, I've been so frightfully busy since I got back into harness. (*A pause.*) Where are you bound for?

LORD HELFORD.
We're just off to Scotland.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Very gloomily.*) And I'm off to Germany for sour milk and black mud baths.

RUPERT.
(*Cheerfully.*) I always think a mud bath sounds so grateful and comforting—like floating in a pool of warm chocolate cream. (*To* GWENDOLEN.) But I do hope you're going for the pure joy of the thing, and not because you're seedy.

GWENDOLEN.
I'm ordered to take a strong course of them, thank you—I've overworked myself, I suppose.

LORD HELFORD.
That's what I always said, didn't I ? Women aren't physically fitted to emulate men.

RUPERT.
(*Tenderly.*) But oughtn't you to be on the sofa ?

GWENDOLEN.
Do you wish to mock me ? Aren't you aware that women don't lie on sofas nowadays ? Why are you here ?

RUPERT.
You forgot to give me my last week's wages.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Turning to her father—icily.*) Would you kindly give him fifteen shillings, father ? (*Correcting.*) No—seventeen shillings—two shillings for overtime.

LORD HELFORD.
(*Protesting.*) I—my dear—I ! Really, Gwen !

GWENDOLEN.
I haven't any money here. My dressmaker doesn't allow me a pocket.

RUPERT.
(*Explaining to* LORD HELFORD.) Never mind! It was only the best excuse I could make for this intrusion.

LORD HELFORD.
(*With unction.*) Why don't you girls start an agitation —Pockets for Women? If you succeeded, you'd get something really useful at last.

LADY ELIZABETH AND GWENDOLEN.
Father!
(LADY JANE *rushes in excitedly.* MRS MAJORIBANKS *and* CONNIE *return.*)

LADY JANE.
I want eighteenpence, father—quick.

LORD HELFORD.
Whatever's the matter?

LADY JANE.
We've bust up! The manager's bunked with all the coin and left the whole company stranded at Cockermouth—starving! I see I shall have to run a show of my own in future.

LORD HELFORD.
I'm thankful to say there's no one to finance it!

LADY JANE.
Oh, yes, there is—there's you!

LORD HELFORD.
And this is what my daughters call independence!

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
(*To* LADY JANE *as* LORD HELFORD *hands her the money.*) Is all that to keep the wolf from the door of your starving company, darling ?

LADY JANE.
No—the cab. (*She hurries out.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Dear Jane seems over head and ears in the century —already.

LORD HELFORD.
Come to the smoking-room, Amberfield, and have a cigar. (*With meaning severity.*) We never smoke here !
(LORD HELFORD *and* COLONEL AMBERFIELD *go out together.*)

CONNIE.
I'm off for a stroll with Dolly. He's awfully anxious to get some culture quick ; so I've promised to buy him a Robert Browning Birthday Book.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
I must be flitting too. I want to glimpse along into the best Bond Street shops to pick up an idea for a toque. I save guineas and guineas by cobbling up all my new toques myself. I shall be back in a jiff.
(CONNIE, MRS MAJORIBANKS, *and* LADY ELIZABETH *go out together.*)

GWENDOLEN.
I am given to understand I owe my dismissal to you.

RUPERT.
Who told you that ?

GWENDOLEN.
Never mind who—you can't deny it.

RUPERT.
But I can—I do!

GWENDOLEN.
And you went off without seeing Mr Tolson to put in a word in my favour. If you'd only warned me or even dropped a hint, I might have found him and talked him over. I was too proud to throw myself on his mercy after the insults of his wife.

RUPERT.
I thought it was wiser not.

GWENDOLEN.
Why did you hold your tongue? For my sake, I suppose?

RUPERT.
For yours.

GWENDOLEN.
As the signal proof of your passionate love?

RUPERT.
The greatest possible. You were fagging yourself to death.

GWENDOLEN.
Well, what of that?

RUPERT.
You'd have struggled on till you dropped.

GWENDOLEN.
Perhaps! Yes, I think I should.

RUPERT.
(*Eagerly.*) You admit it—you prove my case. I like to look after you. I saw you wearing yourself to a shadow. And so I let things take their course, although

I ran the risk of losing your esteem—shall we call it? I sacrificed my possible happiness to yours. I saved you, in spite of yourself. It's my last proof of devotion.

GWENDOLEN.

If you really felt all this solicitude, you might have warned me against overwork, or reasoned with me beforehand!

RUPERT.

You wouldn't have stood it! You're so high-spirited—you'd never have given in. Whereas now, you see, you can't reproach yourself with the fear that you're wasting your time or shirking your duty. You can revel in the blackest of mud with the clearest of consciences.

GWENDOLEN.

Was the state of my health the only reason?

RUPERT.

No. I've been hoping to get you a new appointment—a "rise in life," as they say. I hope to induce my uncle to offer you the agency of his property. Or, if he can't do that, I've asked him to make you his agent's understudy—"an under-secretary of estate"—shall we call it?

GWENDOLEN.

Here I am—out of a situation! Free—waiting—but I haven't received the offer.

RUPERT.

Certainly not! I'm determined that you shall have a thorough rest first. I want to see you built up by those baths before you even consider the scheme.

GWENDOLEN.

I may depend on your uncle's proposing it, then?

RUPERT.
Oh, I think so! I think he's going to jump at it. I've written him most eloquently on the subject.

GWENDOLEN.
You are not aware, perhaps, that he has just this moment declared that nothing would ever induce him to have a girl grubbing about on his farms.

RUPERT.
(*smiling.*) Did he?—poor uncle! His irony's always being misunderstood. It's what I believe is called American humour. The fun all lies in the deadly serious way it's taken.

GWENDOLEN.
He's in the house! (*Crossing and ringing the bell.*) I intend to investigate his irony. I shall ask him if he entertains such an idea.

RUPERT.
He generally entertains people—not ideas. But I'll go and tell him you'd like an interview.

GWENDOLEN.
Kindly stay where you are. I can't trust you. (*The* FOOTMAN *enters.*) Would you tell Colonel Amberfield I should be glad to see him for a few minutes if he is disengaged?

FOOTMAN.
Yes, my lady.

RUPERT.
Would you tell Colonel Amberfield that I would be glad of an interview also?

FOOTMAN.
Yes, sir. (*He goes.*)

GWENDOLEN.
I must see him before you.

RUPERT.
You may !—but I intend to speak to him first.

GWENDOLEN.
There used to be an old saying "*Place aux dames*," but no doubt it's quite a thing of the past.

RUPERT.
Yes. I suppose there was a fear it might seem to cast doubt on your sex's supremacy, and therefore good breeding demanded its gradual disuse.
(COLONEL AMBERFIELD *enters cheerfully.*)

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
(*Cheerily.*) You both want to see me, I'm told. Here I am ! Now let's all see each other together—and get it over.

GWENDOLEN.
No ! Alone !

RUPERT.
Alone !

GWENDOLEN.
And first.

RUPERT.
And first !

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Oh, nonsense, nonsense ! (*To* GWENDOLEN.) I'll see you alone in a minute, Lady Gwendolen. I want to ! I'm going to give you a little scolding. In the meantime, what is it you both have to say ?

GWENDOLEN.
Mr Warriner tells me he allowed me to be dismissed from my farm, out of anxiety for my health.

RUPERT.
Lady Gwendolen's so packed with pluck, she'd never have thrown up the sponge—she'd have died first. I was forced not to interfere when Providence sent a chance of relief.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Quite right! No gentleman could have acted otherwise.

GWENDOLEN.
He now adds that you propose to offer me the agency to your property.

RUPERT.
Or under-secretary of estate——

GWENDOLEN.
And that he connived at my dismissal so that I might be free to accept it.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Did he say that? Famous! (*Chuckling.*) I shouldn't have given him credit for so much romantic courage. It's splendid!

RUPERT.
One never knows how splendid one may be until one tries. I don't look for thanks—I don't expect gratitude. (*To* GWENDOLEN.) But I do ask, Gwendolen, that you'll try to acknowledge I've done my best. No man can do more than that.

GWENDOLEN.
To hear you two men talk, one would fancy it was I

who was in the wrong instead of being the victim. (*To* COLONEL AMBERFIELD.) Of course I knew perfectly well that no idea of engaging me has ever entered your head.

RUPERT.
But it must have crossed his mind when he got my letter.

GWENDOLEN.
(*To* COLONEL AMBERFIELD.) You'd never have a lady bailiff grubbing about on a farm of yours!

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Ah, that was my old-fashioned wit!

RUPERT.
Didn't I say so?

GWENDOLEN.
You said "American humour"—but I'm sure it's equally damping, whatever it's called.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Would you mind leaving us for a moment, Rupert? I think that when Lady Gwendolen and I have had out our little encounter, we shall understand each other much better. It oughtn't to take long after that to settle the terms of her engagement. (RUPERT *goes into the back room through the folding doors. The reproof, though not hidden, is helped by his kindness of manner.*) Now, before I make any proposals, I'm going to pick a bone with you, Lady Gwendolen. So you'll have to be patient with an old fellow who's fond of speaking his mind. It's very few men who'd do all Rupert's done—to win any girl. I don't think you appreciate the self-sacrifice of his con-

duct. It's true he did write to me to suggest you as my agent. Don't you think he must have been madly in love to propose anything so Quixotic ?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Puzzled.*) Was it so Quixotic ?

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Worse ! Do you know that you've treated him shamefully—simply shamefully—madam ?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Half-scared — half-protesting.*) I don't understand you !

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
You got him down to play the fool on your farm—under false pretences.

GWENDOLEN.
What do you mean ?

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
He worked for you like a second Jacob—not expecting to be left for his pains. What business had you to accept his services if you couldn't take them seriously ?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Beginning to grow confused.*) I—thought the out-of-door exercise would be good for his health—and his character.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
And why should you trouble about his good ?

GWENDOLEN.
(*Faltering.*) I—I don't know.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
I do! (*Hitting the nail's head sharply.*) It's because you love him.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Gradually overcome.*) Hush! You shouldn't say so. It isn't fair—or kind. But I daresay I made a mistake. I daresay I failed in that—as I've failed in everything.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
Admit your failure! (*Takes her hand kindly.*) Come —come! You owe it to him after all he has gone through.
(*He goes to the door and beckons* RUPERT.)

GWENDOLEN.
(*On the edge of tears.*) Do I? Then I'll confess it, although he must see it too well already.

COLONEL AMBERFIELD.
(*Half aside.*) And if you're very nice to him you shall help my agent after all.
(RUPERT *comes in and the* COLONEL *slips out on tip-toe.*)

GWENDOLEN.
(*Meekly.*) I hope you'll enjoy the farm and run it better than I did—you can't run it worse.

RUPERT.
What do you mean?

GWENDOLEN.
Aren't you going to take the farm—my farm?

RUPERT.
Certainly not!

GWENDOLEN.
But they offered it you?

RUPERT.
Do you think I would have taken it after your dismissal? No, Gwen—I refused it with indignation.

GWENDOLEN.
(*With a touch of pathetic despair.*) Then I was wrong as usual. I want to tell you, I know I've failed in everything. It was a folly—a blunder—to ask you down to work. You naturally thought I was giving you "encouragement," as it is called. That's the saddest part of being a woman. We're always taken at the false valuation of sentiment. We can never hope to be treated as rational equals. I was in the wrong, and I've failed.

RUPERT.
In all your higher ambitions?

GWENDOLEN.
Yes, in all!

RUPERT.
(*lipping his arm round her.*) And so there's nothing left, I suppose—but the second best.

GWENDOLEN.
(*Leaning against him.*) The second best! (*He kisses her and a smile of happiness crosses her face as she murmurs slowly.*) I think—I shall like the second best—best!

RUPERT.
It's the best—the only best for woman—or man. And now, darling, that we're engaged——

GWENDOLEN.
(*Naïvely.*) But are we—has our engagement really begun?

RUPERT.
Yes, dearest, can't you feel it?

GWENDOLEN.

(*Hastily.*) Then if it has, we must keep it a perfect secret at present, Rupert. We shall have to confide in father, of course, and the others. But we won't let a soul outside know—for weeks and weeks—will we ?

RUPERT.

Of course not ! Most engagements begin like that—for the first two days—I've noticed.

(LORD HELFORD, LADY ELIZABETH, *and* LADY JANE *enter.* RUPERT *takes* LORD HELFORD *aside and whispers.* GWENDOLEN *takes her sisters aside and whispers also.*)

LADY ELIZABETH.

(*Kissing her delightedly.*) Oh, Gwennie, how sweet ! I only hope it won't handicap your career—your rise in life.

LORD HELFORD.

(*Seizing* RUPERT'S *hand.*) Delighted !

LADY JANE.

(*Kissing* GWENDOLEN.) It's too nice, but it's professional suicide !

LORD HELFORD.

(*Crossing to* GWENDOLEN.) My dear, I devoutly hope it is. (*He kisses her.*) Marriage is woman's only true rise in life.

(MRS MAJORIBANKS *enters, carrying a small bag. She sits, and takes out a piece of velvet, some flowers, etc.*)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.

I've bought all the things for my toque, and I've stolen the latest French inspiration from Marshall and Snelgrove.

GWENDOLEN.

(*Whispering to her sisters.*) Shall I tell her ?

THE SISTERS.
Yes, yes!
(GWENDOLEN *whispers in* MRS MAJORIBANKS' *ear*. MRS MAJORIBANKS *springs up, dropping everything out of her lap, and kisses* GWENDOLEN *twice*.)

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Oh, you darling! It's just like my luck in mischief-making. When I've once put my finger in the pie, there's a wedding cake not far off.

RUPERT.
(*Picking up the materials*.) If you make your toques as beautifully as you make your mischief, you'll have half the women in London at your feet.

GWENDOLEN.
But mind, aunt, it's a dreadful secret!

RUPERT.
And if you don't keep it more dreadfully than you kept the other one, no toque on earth will save you from the vengeance of Gwen.

MRS MAJORIBANKS.
Oh, I always hedge with Gwen. I never take the bull by the horns—when I'm cornered.
(*Enter* DOLLY *and* CONNIE.)

DOLLY.
You seem having quite a family confab.

RUPERT.
I claim your congratulations.

DOLLY.
(*Imitating his father*.) Not another irreparable blow about to descend on our doomed and degenerate house?

LORD HELFORD.
No. We're engaged in staving it off.

RUPERT.
(*Taking* GWENDOLEN'S *hand.*) Let me present my future wife to you.

DOLLY.
Dear, dear! So supergirls can marry!

GWENDOLEN.
(*Looking at him lovingly.*) Not only your future wife, Rupert, for I hope in time to prove myself worthy of being your uncle's agent also.

RUPERT.
Good! And I—though I cease to be a clodhopper, it seems I remain a husband-man after all.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

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17

21 Mixt marr.

21 2tal. girl w.out a dot

28 [illegible] Kiss

30 Roseadorá !

48 tongs

49 D

61 Stock Exchange [illegible] Bull Point [illegible] tobacco

64 [illegible] of an hereafter time ; (he means later)

65 E

95 nobby

96 antipyrin, a depressant

97 [illegible] gospel

[illegible] very funny (cf [illegible])

98 [illegible] saying 'infa[illegible]' [illegible] (The man [illegible])

99 daily egg [illegible]

100 orangel-tawzer (cf tawzer [illegible])

103 cricket, '22

108 [illegible]

112 That bomb [illegible] purple

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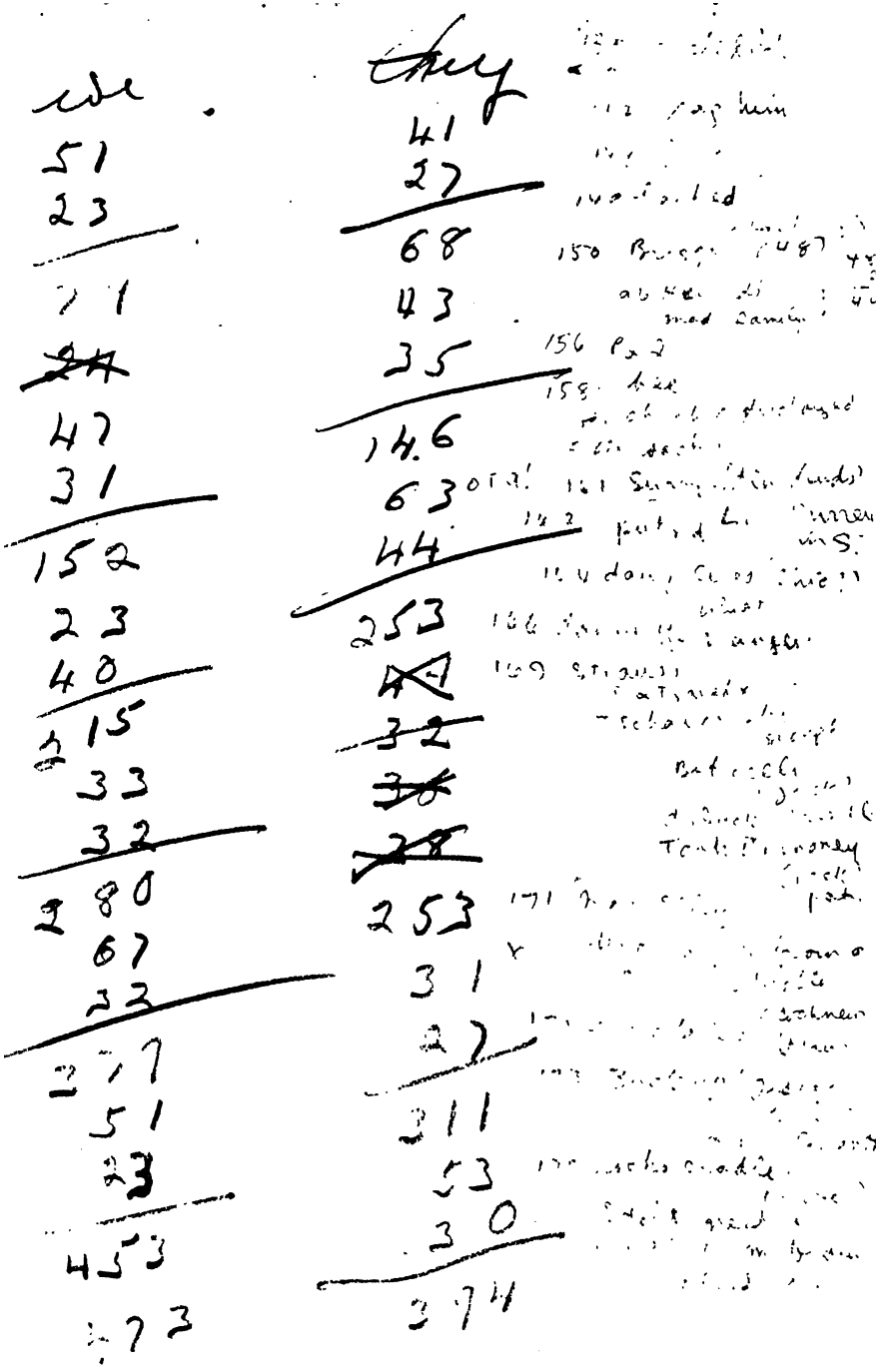

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